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The Captured Mind:
Race, Brainwashing, and American Film, c1941-53

Ian Magor
2020

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD
Birkbeck College, University of London

Declaration

I declare that all the material presented in this thesis is my own work. No part of this thesis has otherwise been published or submitted for examination at Birkbeck, University of London or any other institution.

Abstract

This thesis addresses a period when cinematic mythmaking, racial discourse, fears of captivity and mind control coalesced and provided some of the conceptual underpinnings of brainwashing. Throughout World War II and in the decades following, the United States government recognised its own segregated society as an impediment to its claims to lead the free world. Film and cinema were important tools in the attempt to steer Americans away from racist discourse and to convince the rest of the world that changes were afoot. This thesis focuses on the American use of film during, and in the immediate period after, World War II (from 1941 to 1953). It shows how the medium was used to try to reverse negative ideas relating to black Americans and to redeploy these against its wartime and postwar enemies. It does this through a close reading and contextualising of a range of films made in this period, from army training films to Hollywood blockbusters.

The greatest fears of many white Americans – and the ground on which many filmmakers were most wary of treading – were attached to ‘race-mixing’, also known as miscegenation. Individual anxieties were heightened by the imminent, if gradual, dismantling of segregation. The Cold War seemingly introduced a new, racialised threat: communists. Fears of communism drew on much of the racialised logic of American culture. But it also amplified anxieties about persuasion and captivity – mind control, behaviour control, and what could possibly be changed, disguised, or perverted by enemies in order to infiltrate, and captivate, American society. Brainwashing was a powerful culmination of this cultural anxiety. And this thesis argues that there are significant crossovers of language and concepts concerning race and brainwashing, which become more apparent when we look at the history of film production and reception in this period.

Acknowledgements

Collaboration is at the heart of this thesis. It seeks out the shared efforts which went into the creation of films with 'the name above the title'. My name appears below the title of this study but it could not sit there without the help of a number of other people. The most direct help has come from an exceptionally bright set of scholars who have worked alongside me on the Hidden Persuaders project at Birkbeck. Marcie Holmes, Charlie Williams, Katie Joice and Sarah Marks have all taken time to discuss, challenge, and finesse my often inchoate thoughts. The Birkbeck administrative staff have also been incredibly helpful, particularly Siân Green, Katy Pettit, and Alison Watson. It has been a privilege to work with such a committed group of people. Generous funding from the Wellcome Trust enabled the project to thrive, and my own research would not have been possible without their financial support. Professor Daniel Pick has been the fulcrum of the project and has provided essential support throughout my study. His enthusiasm, patience, encouragement, and practical advice have maintained my focus whenever I have begun questioning the point of it all. I am still working on shortening sentences. I was fortunate to receive great help during a research trip to America. I would like to thank Lin Fredericksen for making me so welcome at the Kansas Historical Society Archives, Louise Hilton for helping me to navigate the archives at the Margaret Herrick Library in Hollywood, and Marisa Shaari of the Oskar Diethelm Library in New York for her warmth and patience. The final draft shows, I hope, the benefit of astute comments from a number of readers, namely, Simon Jarrett, Andy Moore, Joe Cocozza, Max Okore, and Jill Rayner, along with proofreading from Michael Neal. I have also received helpful advice and practical backing at various stages of the research from Shaul Bar-Haim, Lisa Baraitser, and Danae Karydaki. I mentioned earlier the great contribution of Marcie Holmes as part of Hidden Persuaders and I must thank her particularly for her continued support and invaluable advice since she moved on from the project in 2018. My family have provided support throughout and have always expressed confidence in me. Sean Dower has been a great friend and a creative inspiration throughout the research. The incisive feedback I received from my examiners, Ian Christie and Melvyn Stokes, allowed me to deliver a more convincing thesis. And finally, Verity. We met just as I was applying to join the project and she has been with me every step of the way. I have

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Table of Contents

DECLARATION.....	2
ABSTRACT.....	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	6
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	9
PREFACE	10
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION.....	14
BRAINWASHING AS WORD AND CONCEPT	17
THE NEXUS OF RACE, CINEMA, AND BRAINWASHING	19
HOMER PLESSY AND CARRIAGES OF INJUSTICE	25
THE AMERICAN MELTING POT	31
THE AMERICAN CREED	36
FILM AS A RESEARCH TOOL.....	38
STRUCTURE OF THESIS	40
PART ONE	48
DOMINATION ENDS AT THE SCALP: RACE AND BRAINWASHING	48
CHAPTER 2 – AMERICAN HISTORY AND RACE.....	49
THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION AND CAPTIVITY	52
THE SLAVE CAMP	54
MILIEU CONTROL	58
THE SPECTACLE OF RACE.....	64
JAMES BALDWIN AND RACIAL INTEGRATION.....	66
VIEWING WITH FANON	68
CHAPTER 3 – CAPTIVE MINDS: AMERICAN PRISONERS IN KOREA	72

THE WORD “BRAINWASHING”	73
THE KOREAN WAR AND BRAINWASHING ALLEGATIONS	78
KOREA AND RACE	83
THE STEEL HELMET	90
SLEEPER AGENTS AND MULATTOS.....	93
PART TWO	96
CAPTIVE AUDIENCES	96
CHAPTER 4 – FILM, RACE, AND THE BIRTH OF A NATION	97
EARLY CINEMA AND ITS AUDIENCES.....	100
THE BIRTH OF A NATION	111
JACK JOHNSON	118
A DEARTH OF IMAGINATION	123
INTERWAR RESEARCH AND REPRESENTATION	125
GROUP RESPONSES AND RACE	130
THOUGHT CONTROL IN THE USA.....	132
CHAPTER 5 – AMERICAN PROPAGANDA AND RACE.....	136
ARMY INDOCTRINATION.....	137
INTERSTATE COMMERCE HEARINGS.....	140
PROCEEDINGS OF THE WRITERS’ CONGRESS.....	145
THE MAKING OF <i>THE NEGRO SOLDIER</i>	148
THE FILM OF <i>THE NEGRO SOLDIER</i>	154
<i>KILL OR BE KILLED</i>	158
<i>INTRODUCTION TO THE ARMY</i>	160
DEADLY PERSUASIONS	161
CHAPTER 6 – A JAPANESE TURN.....	163
PEARL HARBOR.....	165
INSECTS AND EXTERMINATION.....	170
<i>KNOW YOUR ENEMY: JAPAN</i>	173

<i>OUR JOB IN JAPAN</i>	179
<i>BEHIND THE RISING SUN</i>	184
<i>FIRST YANK INTO TOKYO</i>	189
CHAPTER 7 – THE RETURN OF THE BRAVE	198
FILMING TRAUMA	198
HYPNOSIS, DRUGS, AND PSYCHOANALYSIS.....	201
<i>PSYCHIATRIC PROCEDURES IN THE COMBAT ARENA</i>	206
<i>LET THERE BE LIGHT</i>	208
<i>SHADES OF GRAY</i>	212
<i>HOME OF THE BRAVE</i>	218
CHAPTER 8 – PINKY: NEITHER BLACK NOR WHITE	224
PAVING THE WAY FOR THE RACE CYCLE	225
THE FILM.....	226
DARRYL ZANUCK	230
SPYROS P. SKOURAS	233
ELIA KAZAN	234
JEANNE CRAIN	235
PHILIP DUNNE	237
CRITICAL RECEPTION	239
LIGHT AND SHADE	243
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION	249
MISCEGENATION	253
CAPTIVITY AND SEGREGATION	255
FILM AND PROPAGANDA.....	257
PSYCHOANALYSIS AND RACE	258
THE IMPACT OF THE RACE CYCLE OF FILMS	261
BIBLIOGRAPHY	263

List of Illustrations

<i>Figure 1: Melting Pot Ceremony at Ford English School, July 4, 1917.</i>	32
<i>Figure 2: Chinese brain cleaning cartoon</i>	77
<i>Figure 3: The Red asks Tanaka about Japanese internment.</i>	92
<i>Figure 4: The Red senses Tanaka's unease.</i>	92
<i>Figure 5: A black mother is shown giving her struggling child a bath.</i>	106
<i>Figure 6: Crystal Lake attitudinal tests on <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> (1915)</i>	129
<i>Figure 7: Nazis burn books in <i>The Mortal Storm</i> (1939).</i>	144
<i>Figure 8: The 'well-mixed plasma cocktail' of Japanese in <i>Know Your Enemy: Japan</i> (1945).</i>	177
<i>Figure 9: The thought-police and spirits see everything in <i>Know Your Enemy: Japan</i> (1945).</i>	178
<i>Figure 10: Theodor Geisel cartoon showing Japanese as cats.</i>	181
<i>Figure 11: Theodor Geisel cartoon showing Japanese-German offspring.</i>	181
<i>Figure 12: Theodor Geisel cartoon on the racial prejudice bug.</i>	182
<i>Figure 13: Theodor Geisel cartoon showing the cleansing of a Nazi brain.</i>	183
<i>Figure 14: Tom Neal in Hollywood make-up in <i>Behind the Rising Sun</i> (1943).</i>	186
<i>Figure 15: Tom Neal in plastic surgery in <i>First Yank into Tokyo</i> (1945).</i>	186
<i>Figure 16: Promotional poster for <i>Behind the Rising Sun</i> (1943).</i>	187
<i>Figure 17: Promotion for screening of <i>First Yank into Tokyo</i> (1945).</i>	192
<i>Figure 18: Film reveals Steve's true identity in <i>First Yank into Tokyo</i> (1945).</i>	195
<i>Figure 19: Photographs showing food parcels handed out in <i>Behind the Rising Sun</i> (1943).</i>	196
<i>Figure 20: Film exposes the truth of the packages in <i>Behind the Rising Sun</i> (1943).</i>	196
<i>Figure 21: Soldiers symbolised as white when mentally healthy in <i>Shades of Gray</i> (1948).</i>	214
<i>Figure 22: Soldiers symbolised as black when mentally unwell in <i>Shades of Gray</i> (1948).</i>	214
<i>Figure 23: Real patient in <i>Psychiatric Procedures in the Combat Area</i> (1944).</i>	215
<i>Figure 24: Actor recreating the scene in <i>Shades of Gray</i> (1948).</i>	215
<i>Figure 25: Promotional posters for <i>Home of the Brave</i> (1949).</i>	219
<i>Figure 26: Promotions showing queues for <i>Pinky</i> (1949).</i>	228
<i>Figure 27: Illustrations from <i>Look</i> magazine showing skin-lightening effects.</i>	243
<i>Figure 28: Pinky steps out of the shadow.</i>	244
<i>Figure 29: Pinky fades to black.</i>	245
<i>Figure 30: Final frames of <i>Pinky</i> (1949).</i>	245
<i>Figure 31: Pinky places herself where her race can be recognised.</i>	247

*Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.
Paul Laurence Dunbar 1896*

Preface

Here it was, the old name, and with it the old dark, secret shame. It had been here all the time waiting for her. She was not ready for it. The sound of it shocked her, like a bell that tolls before the hour. She knew she ought to acknowledge it, and yet she could not. ... She was limp and spent, and pure amazement fizzed her as she saw that he did not even know what he had done, that he had no realization of how it had seemed to her. He had been just as he always was, no doubt, with – with people like her. A machine, implacable, blind, pitiless. And she – she was the thing the machine had passed over.¹

The author, Cid Ricketts Sumner, describes here the moment of recognition of a young light-skinned woman as a “Negro”² in the American South. It is a remarkably dense passage that merits careful scrutiny and serves to introduce key themes of this thesis. The scene comes from the first chapter of the novel *Quality* (1946). The chapter explains how the representatives of the railroad company put the heroine, Pinkey, in the “wrong” coloured carriage. This occurred when she set off as a child from the South to go to school in the North. She is now returning, and as she disembarks from the train, we see that she is the only passenger who has not gone through one of the station doors marked WHITE or COLORED. She is described as alien, spectral and ghostlike. Sumner’s evocation of the guard recognising her as black captures something of the trauma which Frantz Fanon would speak of five years later in *Black Skin, White Masks*, when he is shattered by a boy’s exclamation: ‘Look, a Negro’, while travelling on a train.³ What Sumner also manages to do is to show how this interaction

¹ Cid Ricketts Sumner, *Quality* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1946), 8–11.

² The thesis will at times use, reluctantly, the racial epithets of the time it is considering. It is the recognition of a “Negro” rather than a black person or a person of dual heritage that is taking place here and this can only be properly captured in the language of the time. When I use a more toxic version of this epithet, I will use N----. I will generally use the term *black American* to refer to those identified as Negro, African American, Afro-American, or coloured. Because the thesis usually reflects white people identifying others as black ostensibly due to their skin colour, I use *black* rather than *Black*, which I take as the black person assuming an identity of blackness for themselves, rather than being assigned it by whites. If this latter use is obvious, I try to capitalise it.

³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New ed, Get Political (London: Pluto-Press, 2008), 82.

affects the white train guard. The latter adopts a racist stance once he becomes aware of Pinkey's racial heritage. What causes Pinkey to fizz with amazement is the realisation that the guard has no consciousness of what he has done. She has been turned into a thing but he, likewise, has been turned into a machine.

This insight about the consequence of the racialised gaze for both "parties", white and black, was also shared by the American novelist James Baldwin. He too saw clearly how the practice of racism had consequences, including a loss of humanity, for the white perpetrator – perhaps even more so than for the black subject. The white racist can see the black person in front of them⁴ as a human being but must deny this in order to justify treating the victim in the way that they do, leading to a constant process of disavowal and a burying of guilt.

When the young boy addressed Fanon, his words called on and were framed by a history of racism. Fanon feels his body coming back to him distorted and recoloured. The boy states: 'The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a n-----...'⁵ Once the ugly, animalistic and immoral qualities have been attributed to the figure in front of the white audience, they are instructed to look; they are then unable to acknowledge a human but instead see only subhumanity. The novelist and scholar Ralph Ellison spoke of the dualism which shaped the 'white folk mind'. Everything that consciousness sets out to repress, Ellison said in 1958, is shackled to the image of the black man. This means that whenever whites consider questions of sex, national identity, or criminality, they will inevitably summon 'malignant images of black men into consciousness.'⁶ Such images obtain their stickiness, at least partly, from being rooted in culture, and the myths and narratives entwined in it: as Fanon says, 'legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*.'⁷ When the boy says 'look, a n-----', the statement functions both as a command to look and as an order of what to see.

⁴ I will often sacrifice strict grammatical correctness in the interests of trying to remain gender neutral.

⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 2008, 86.

⁶ Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 1st Vintage International ed (New York: Vintage International, 1995), 48.

⁷ W

Sumner refers to the guard becoming blind. It is precisely this idea, or rather this process of *failing to see*, this rendering invisible, that will be foregrounded in the present thesis. In *The Time is Always Now* (2016) Nick Bromell describes how the institutions of segregation were set up by whites with the deliberate purpose of institutionalising their entitlement ‘not to *see* their black fellow citizens.’⁸ Of course, when the invisibility of the black American is raised, it is natural to think of Ellison and his 1952 novel *Invisible Man*.⁹ Again, though, one of the crucial lessons shared by Ellison in this novel was that the black person was never invisible to the white American, but the reality of the corporeal figure in the field of vision was always denied, swallowed up by the images absorbed through mythic and cultural stereotypes.

This thesis explores how the visibility of the black person for the white observer has been contained, distorted and denied in twentieth-century white America. I use the term *visuality* to refer to the wider cultural significance of images.¹⁰ The image which white people process of black people is inevitably an amalgamation of what they actually see and what they have been conditioned to see. I note the often bizarre and irrational ways through which white people were made to misrecognise and fail to see their fellow citizens. The thesis examines the thorough and ongoing education, discipline, and everyday enforcement to achieve this powerful coding, and active work of rendering the object ‘unseen’. I draw here on the notion well described by the philosopher Lewis Gordon, as ‘a carefully crafted discipline of unseeing’.¹¹ I show how one of the main tools for achieving this condition of seeing and unseeing was cinema. In many cases, the cinema centred its vision of racial difference around black skin, through both viewing practices and what was shown on the screen. This thesis explores what happened when a movie industry which had contributed to the damaging images of black Americans for five decades, attempted to reverse the process, using its

⁸ Nicholas Knowles Bromell, *The Time Is Always Now: Black Thought and the Transformation of US Democracy* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 46.

⁹ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 2nd Vintage International ed (New York: Vintage International, 1995).

¹⁰ The term is accredited to Hal Foster who was keen to separate the physical act of sight from what we describe as vision, which he characterised as ‘how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein.’ Hal Foster, ed., *Vision and Visuality, Discussions in Contemporary Culture 2* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 19), ix.

¹¹ Lewis R. Gordon, in *Frederick Douglass: A Critical Reader*, ed. Bill E. Lawson and Frank M. Kirkland (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 222–23.

exemplary powers of manipulation to further a tolerance of difference and a revulsion of prejudice.

Before embarking on this history, I acknowledge feeling some unease, as a white British male writer, in offering analysis of artefacts which deal with racism in a different place and time. There are views and opinions which I might find offensive that most people in that milieu would not, and vice versa. My own particular environment might lead me to miss or misread various cultural nuances. My aim is to deconstruct the machinations of racism, as exemplified by a white, visual culture, which I have experienced directly. I am aware that in writing this history, I might not be able to fully remove myself from further exercising of that objectifying gaze. I take it as a fundamental truth that there is no biological basis for racial hierarchies; indeed that 'race' as such does not exist in any meaningful biological sense.¹² I also insist that the idea that skin colour could be a reliable indicator of intelligence or moral worth is patent nonsense which requires no empirical proof. At the same time, it is vital to recognise the social reality of blackness in order to dismantle the power structures built up around its subjugation.

¹² For an excellent account of how science has given credibility to racist discourse see Angela Saini, *Superior: The Return of Race Science* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2019).

Chapter 1 – Introduction

There are no white people per se, only those who pass as white.¹
Daniel Bernardi

The questions which form the core of this thesis revolve around the release of five American films between 1949 and 1950.² In each case, the central theme of the movie was race. This flurry of releases and the concomitant promotional and marketing material which accompanied them are striking. They invite questions about timing and purpose. There is a sharp contrast to be drawn between these intense cinematic conversations about race and the long, marked silence that preceded them. But these films were only the most noted of a more general trend to finally address issues relating to race and national identity. This introduction contextualises this cluster of films, examining the milieu in which they were initiated, produced, viewed, reacted to, and historicised.

The five films, I contend, illuminate a wider shift in postwar³ representations of ‘race’, in short, from “the heart” to “the mind” as the principal source of identity. During the early part of the twentieth century, a person’s heredity, thought to be marked by skin colour and physical features, or “blood”, was widely taken as the defining feature of identity. I argue that the opprobrium attached to theories of eugenics and racial superiority after World War II meant that these markers were less available for political or academic scrutiny. Identity became more enshrined in and performed through social rituals and networks. These might take the form of pledges, oaths, or memberships. This reflected a culture that offered, or at least extolled, the value of greater social mobility: being born with a dark skin need no longer require, a priori, a person’s subjugation. However, this new account of Americanism also led to

¹ Daniel Bernardi, ed., *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), xxi.

² The five films were, in order of release: *Home of the Brave*, *Lost Boundaries*, *Pinky*, *Intruder in the Dust* (all 1949), and *No Way Out* (1950). Although I only discuss the first and third of these at length, it is the historical moment of the focalised grouping of the films that demands attention.

³ I use the term *postwar* in the manner of the historian Tony Judt to refer to those years in the immediate aftermath of World War II rather than as post-war to refer to any time after 1945.

anxiety because, in a sense, everyone was now required to discover and prove who they were.

A particular contribution of this thesis is to suggest that the same anxieties which exacerbated postwar uncertainty about race and identity – glaringly manifested in the cycle of Hollywood films – also formed the basis of the American brainwashing scares of the 1950s. Each elicited and exaggerated uncertainties over the reliability of the visible register. White skin was destabilised in these movies as a signifier of a “pure” American stock and character. Likewise, in the aftermath of the Korean War (1950–53), although a returning prisoner might display the outward markers of national loyalty, those who looked closely enough for the signs might see a converted communist intent on spreading a foreign creed.

Such doubts over recognition of others (and the misrecognition of oneself) worked towards producing anxiety, paranoia, and mental collapse. The novelist Richard Wright suggested that

the American Negro has come as near being the victim of a complete rejection as our society has been able to work out, for the dehumanised image of the Negro which white Americans carry in their minds, the anti-Negro epithets continuously on their lips, exclude the contemporary Negro as truly as though he were kept in a steel prison, and doom even those Negroes who are as yet unborn.⁴

The dehumanised image of the Negro which white Americans carry in their minds is a central concern of this thesis and I show how this was bolstered through its presence – and more importantly its absence – on the cinema screen, and suggest how it went unchallenged in respect of other, more positive representations. Instead, Hollywood characteristically opted to represent the black American as criminal, lazy, greedy, superstitious, supercilious, hypersexual, or frigid.

I offer a condensed history of this style of representation in Chapter 4. However, the scope of this study is more precise: this is not a history of black representation in the cinema. In that regard, I draw on the copious work already provided by several historians, particularly by Thomas Cripps and Donald Bogle.⁵ Rather, my concern is

⁴ Horace R. Cayton and St. Clair Drake, *Black Metropolis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946), xxxiii.

⁵ See Peter Noble, *The Negro in Films* (London: Skelton Robinson, 1949). V.J. Jerome, *The Negro in Hollywood Films* (New York: Masses and Mainstream, 1950). Daniel J. Leab, *From Sambo to Superspade: The Black Experience in Motion Pictures* (Boston. MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1975).

to show how the institution of Hollywood cinema was used for propaganda purposes by military, political, and psychological strategists during World War II. I then argue that these ties were only partially loosened at the end of the war. Therefore, when it was apparent that the image of America as a compromised Jim Crow⁶ democracy was holding back the country's global ambitions, Hollywood needed little prodding to assist in transforming this perception. This is not to say that the industry functioned at the behest of the government; it is to claim that its commercial interests were best served by remaining in tune with government thinking and anticipating future direction.⁷

This thesis draws out some of the factors which made postwar America such productive ground for public fears, and associated fantasies, over identity, performativity, and ultimately, brainwashing. At the same time, I argue that a visual language and discursive framework had been developing over a much longer span, and particularly how the late nineteenth century was a crucial period in the destabilising of visual confidence. No doubt a broader argument could also be advanced here: that this destabilisation of vision was apparent across the Western world, but this is beyond my scope, albeit this thesis is informed by some of these wider commentaries, such as Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer* (1990) and Scott Curtis's *The Shape of Spectatorship* (2015).⁸

It is then the social and cultural history of the period between 1941 and 1953 which forms the context of this thesis, and the setting for the close analysis provided below of a cluster of films from this period. The entry of America into World War II following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 brought together the government,

Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretative History of Blacks in American Films* (Oxford: Roundhouse, 1994). Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900–1942* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁶ This term refers to the laws that enforced racial segregation in the South between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and their gradual dismantling in the era of Civil Rights after 1950. Jim Crow, or Jump Jim Crow, was the name of a minstrel routine.

⁷ For an analysis of the state of Hollywood and threats to its hegemony, see Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*, vol. 6, *History of the American Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁸ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990). Scott Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship: Art, Science, and Early Cinema in Germany*, *Film and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

the armed services, the film industry, and psychological and sociological professionals (among others) in a concerted effort of cooperation. This period also marked a point at which it became clear that the country had to change – at the very least in terms of outward appearances – in its treatment of black Americans. This thesis examines various films made between 1942 and 1950, this pre-brainwashing period, which hint at the practices and the Manichaeian world view that would be central to that new term: brainwashing. It highlights methods, technologies, language, and imagery that would eventually coalesce and mutate into understandings and misunderstandings of the new concept.

Brainwashing as Word and Concept

Although the word *brainwashing* did not come into being until 1950, I claim that it was created not to refer to a new concept but rather to act as a (deliberately) loose term to bracket a range of ideas and practices that came to the fore in postwar America, but which had much longer histories. The case of Cardinal Josef Mindszenty is instructive here. Mindszenty was put on trial by the Hungarian authorities and on 7 February 1949, he confessed to a number of crimes that he could not have committed. Observers commented on his drugged appearance and drew attention to the similarities between him and the confessors in the Soviet purge trials in the late 1930s.⁹ The case attracted a great deal of attention in America. Cardinal Spellman, the Archbishop of New York wrote letters to President Truman, organised rallies and even initiated a Cardinal Mindszenty Day to allow a focused day of prayer and protest.¹⁰ A film was soon produced about Mindszenty's plight, *Guilty of Treason* (1950). This was made before the word entered the language but still pictured techniques that would soon come to be associated with the newly-coined concept.¹¹ Mindszenty was glorified as a man of the highest courage. If he had been broken, it was claimed, then foul methods must

⁹ Matthew W. Dunne, *A Cold War State of Mind: Brainwashing and Postwar American Society, Culture, Politics, and the Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 39–40.

¹⁰ Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 66.

¹¹ If we were looking for other films that might be used to picture brainwashing, we would be well advised to watch early Fritz Lang films such as *Dr Mabuse the Gambler* (1922), *Metropolis* (1927) and *Spione* (1928). Also included would be Robert Heine's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920).

have been used: ‘How the Communists managed it no one in the west knows’.¹² My point here is that although commentators could not use the word brainwashing, they employed almost exactly the same notions regarding nefarious mind control achieved through an arsenal of different methods (drugs, sleep deprivation, debility, dread, etc.) that would come to be encapsulated in the new word. Those speculating about how this might have taken place with Mindszenty, along with the earlier Soviet confessions, might have turned to George Orwell’s recently published *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) with its description of ultimate political power residing in ‘tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing’.¹³

My point here is that we should approach the introduction of the word in the way that Quentin Skinner advises we treat words such as *originality*. Although the word only came into use around the middle of the eighteenth century, the concept of originality was well understood before that date. It is not like the word *emoji* which came into being in 1999 and cannot be used legitimately to refer to anything before that time. This is not to say that we could not talk about its place in a history of using signs and symbols for communication that could go back to the use of hieroglyphics in Ancient Egypt.¹⁴ With the concept of brainwashing I argue that there is nothing in its definition which makes it illogical to apply it to practices which had taken place before 1950. Indeed, one of the earliest books written on the subject of brainwashing was the British psychiatrist William Sargant’s *Battle for the Mind* (1961), in which Sargant claims that the techniques used by the Chinese communists were strikingly similar to those used to bring about religious conversion in various eras. He speaks at length about the impact of John Wesley in converting thousands of English people to Methodism during the eighteenth century.¹⁵ He also includes a chapter by the poet Robert Graves on the parallels between brainwashing and conversion techniques in the ancient world.¹⁶

¹² Article from *Time* magazine reprinted in ‘Long Fights Against Reds, Nazis Mark Mindszenty’s Life’, *Des Moines Sunday Register*, 13 February 1949, 4.

¹³ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1949), 266.

¹⁴ Indeed, there was a recent exhibition at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem which highlighted such connections but at no point argued that emojis really existed before 1999.

¹⁵ William Sargant, *Battle for the Mind, a Physiology of Conversion and Brain-Washing*. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), Chapter 5.

¹⁶ Robert Graves, ‘Brain-Washing in Ancient Times’, in *Battle for the Mind, a Physiology of Conversion and Brain-Washing.*, by William Sargant (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), 191–202.

I should also make clear that when I speak of brainwashing throughout the thesis, I separate two general uses of the term. First, there are assertions that might properly be made about the abilities of individuals and organisations to manipulate minds; but there are also fantasised versions in which minds are completely erased and taken over by outside forces. The first version will often employ tactics which appeal to the irrational in us, operating more on the unconscious level, as with advertising, but they do not wipe out all traces of our past to turn us into new beings. The second version was how Americans came to worry, in the 1950s, about the threat of communists infiltrating the country.¹⁷ This worked by heightening fears of the communist and discouraging any form of contact. It was also the logical outcome of the clash of ideologies. Because communism was presented as the complete antithesis of American democracy, it was also a zero-sum game. To accept communism was to reject every aspect of your former self; it meant effectively shedding all that went before for a new, opposite identity. The unthinkability of this was what made it so difficult for American forces to accept that even as few as 23 prisoners should choose China at the end of the Korean War. This was a case where one person really was one too many.

It is not a vital part of my argument around race and brainwashing but it is interesting to compare the total loss of a person as an American that we see here, with the total loss of a white American who marries a non-white partner. With the one-drop rule, this was also a zero-sum game. Any future family would be black, claims to whiteness erased. Brainwashing in its original manifestation was inseparable from communism and the world was split into two: the communist and the non-communist, or more starkly – and significantly – between the free world and the slave world.¹⁸

The Nexus of Race, Cinema, and Brainwashing

Much interesting work has been undertaken hitherto on the portrayal of race in cinema. There is also substantial literature on the role of cinema in propaganda, and cinema usually figures prominently in histories of brainwashing. This thesis draws

¹⁷ This version is also one that is well-suited as material for the sensational storytelling of cinema. But the way that cinema could potentially influence audiences is only claimed as an instance of the first: part of a box of tools that could be used to manipulate opinions and attitudes.

¹⁸ For an excellent account of how this related to American narratives of captivity and the bifurcation of the world into free and slave see Susan Carruthers, *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

from these rich fields, but it is the films themselves that form the core material, in demonstrating the nexus of postwar American anxieties about race, covert influence, captivity, and identity. These works of cinema are regarded here not merely as entertaining, or for that matter educational snapshots, illustrating political and cultural developments forged elsewhere. Instead they are treated as significant, even powerful factors in postwar culture in their own right. They had political causes and consequences and they contributed to the creation of the contemporary political agenda as much as they drew upon it.

This introduction, along with much of Part 1 of the thesis, focuses on events which preceded this period and the need for their inclusion might not, at first glance, seem apparent. But an overview of the various strands that I argue came together in the brainwashing scare, reveals an interconnected and chronologically similar history. I use this introduction to look at three broad periods which track a shift in white American racial attitudes and how the black racialised Other was supposed to be seen, segregated, accommodated, and assimilated. I examine how the birth of cinema and the institution of racial segregation were used to manage the visibility and visibility of the black body during the 1890s and 1900s. I then explore the idea of the “melting pot” as a means of bringing together various ethnic hyphenates under the umbrella of whiteness in the 1910s and 1920s. Finally, I assess Gunnar Myrdal’s evocation of ‘the American dilemma’ as a dawning recognition that the country must address the contradictions of its racist history.¹⁹ Myrdal’s project allows me to draw together various strands of thought from the 1930s and 1940s.

The year 1896 saw the United States Supreme Court Ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* which upheld the rights of states to provide separate services and facilities on the basis of racial qualifications to occupy particular spaces and amenities. On 26 July that same year, Vitascope Hall in Canal Street, New Orleans, opened its doors as the first ‘storefront theatre’ dedicated solely to the display of motion pictures. These two seemingly diverse events buttressed one another over time. In material terms, as the dominant medium of entertainment, it was of course significant that cinema-going was

¹⁹ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944).

itself a largely segregated event.²⁰ But it also served to reflect the demands of segregation: that black people needed to show themselves in ways which allowed them to be viewed correctly, the ultimate purpose of which was to ensure that white supremacy was maintained by effectively prohibiting miscegenation. This was the real substance of the ruling on Plessy: that he should place himself, and if necessary, declare himself, in such a way that his unsuitability for social mixing, would be obvious to the white people into whose line of vision he might stray. And cinema from its outset helped to reflect and enforce this widespread, majority conviction in opposition to miscegenation. It did so by showing black people as lesser, laughable, marginal, or invisible. Just as noteworthy was how the material shown on the screen brought together various groups of people who had previously been regarded as different ethnicities into a single denomination of whiteness. This was done through the use of hypervisibility and invisibility. White stars were made central and inescapable; black actors were rarely stars and only visible as stereotypes which served to mask rather than reveal.

While it is the emergence of cinema and formalised racial segregation which are privileged in my argument, it is underpinned by another development of the same period: the birth of psychoanalysis. This European practice, the talking cure, came relatively late to America and tended to be treated in a more pragmatic fashion than Freud might have wished for. Freud worried that it would be watered down and become a handmaiden to psychiatry. Indeed, psychoanalysts did require a medical training to practice in America and some institutes insisted that candidates for psychoanalytic training were already trained in psychiatry. Nevertheless, the immigration of a host of European psychoanalysts, filmmakers, and other creatives in the 1930s did lead to a golden age of collaboration between American cinema and psychoanalysis in the 1940s and 1950s at the same time as the film industry was at its most influential.²¹ Intriguingly, as I discuss in Chapter 3, new evidence also shows that

²⁰ In the South, segregation was generally enforced. But even in the North, there was segregation by practice and few cinemas would have had black and white people sitting together. See Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

²¹ I make a distinction here between the way in which psychiatrists and analysts were portrayed as characters in films – and in many cases they were still shady at best and murderous at worst – and the influence of psychoanalysis on screenwriters, actors, and directors, which had a significant impact on storylines, symbols, and styling throughout this period. For accounts of the

the idea of “washing the brain” was developed in China, at about the same time: during the late 1890s.

I make no claim of a direct causal connection between these initial appearances and the later emergence of the idea of brainwashing in America. It is nevertheless interesting that the practices of cinema, psychoanalysis, and brainwashing – which all fed off one another in the postwar period – should all share similar chronologies. In fact, documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis suggests in the title of his series on the impact of psychoanalysis, that the twentieth century was ‘the century of the self’. It was, according to Curtis, this *fin de siècle* moment when people began to really think about the self as something which could be worked on, as something which could be improved, disguised from others, manipulated by outside forces, and even revealed for the first time to oneself.²² If the seeding of such an idea of the self was at the turn of the century, its efflorescence, arguably, was at its midpoint. Interestingly, 1950 also saw the coining of the term *identity crisis* by the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson in *Childhood and Society*.²³

An important claim of this thesis, hitherto insufficiently addressed, if noted at all, is that the process by which white Americans were encouraged to believe they were a superior race, whose future depended on the segregation and ostracization of non-whites, deserves to be regarded as a set of practices akin to brainwashing. We can better understand the emergence of brainwashing narratives in the 1950s and their resonance with the public, if we see them in the light of the racist, segregationist structure of America at that time. As the United States proclaimed itself the beacon of freedom at the end of World War II, there were still thirty states in which marriage between whites and blacks was an offence.²⁴ And in other states, just as was the case

growth and impact of psychoanalysis in America see Nathan G. Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917–1985*, Freud in America, v. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). George Makari, *Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis* (London: Duckworth Overlook, 2010). Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005). John C. Burnham, ed., *After Freud Left: A Century of Psychoanalysis in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

²² Adam Curtis, ‘The Century of the Self’ (BBC Two, 2002).

²³ Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1993).

²⁴ Fourteen of these repealed their anti-miscegenation laws between 1948 and 1967. Sixteen of them had their laws overturned by the Supreme Court decision on *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967.

with segregation more generally, if it was not prohibited by law, it was condemned and outlawed in practice. I argue that the fears which played out around marrying someone from the “wrong” race found a direct echo in the 1950s around being seduced and taken over by communists who had inveigled their way into proper American society. But I go further than this and claim that the ways in which white Americans had been conditioned into seeing things in a way that was false or irrational, and demanded an ongoing process of denial and disavowal, merits being read as a nascent example of brainwashing.

My claim then is that during the first half of the twentieth century, as immigration to America became more restricted, and segregation practices became more extreme, the idea of whiteness became at once more capacious, and at the same time more precarious. For all that more people could claim to be white, the spectre of miscegenation meant that it could easily be taken away. What allowed both of these situations to cohere was the possession of whiteness being defined first and foremost as not-black. As the author Toni Morrison said in 1990 in a conversation with television presenter Bill Moyers:

But to make an American, you had to have all these people from these different classes, different countries, different languages feel close to one another. So, what does an Italian peasant have to say to a German burgher, and what does an Irish peasant have to say to a Latvian? You know, really, they tended to balkanize. But what they could all do is not be black. So, it is not coincidental that the second thing every immigrant learns when he gets off the boat is that word, “n-----.” In that way, he’s establishing oneness, solidarity and union with the country. That is the marker. That’s the one.²⁵

What Morrison is referring to here in the conglomeration of the German, Latvian, and Irish as American is the idea of the “melting-pot”. The 1908 play *The Melting Pot* by Israel Zangwill staged Germans, Frenchmen, Irishmen, Jews, and Russians all playing their part in the making of the modern American. But there was no place for the black American. The idea of the American melting pot was one of various ethnicities and religions coming together and melding into an “Americanness”, to which all contributed, and out of which all were made.²⁶ The melting pot was the basis of a raft

²⁵ ‘Toni Morrison: Dealing with Race in Literature (Part Two)’, *BillMoyers.Com* (blog), accessed 21 September 2019, <https://billmoyers.com/content/toni-morrison-part-2/>.

²⁶ For a thorough account of this process see Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

of World War II films in which a breadth of talents and temperaments forged a unique composite, united by American ideals of liberty and equality.²⁷ I argue that cinema was one of the most important factors in creating an idea of whiteness defined as diametrically and insolubly opposed to blackness. To be non-white was to remain outside of the pot.

Such classifications of inside/outside, included/excluded, black/white, were exemplified by anti-miscegenation legislation which demanded that a person with one-drop of “black blood” be classified as a Negro. The demands around qualifications for whiteness and the scope of segregation became more extreme and irrational in the interwar period. I use this introduction to look at the impact of Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* published in 1944.²⁸ I stress the importance Myrdal placed on the white American obsession with miscegenation and the need to prohibit it.

In providing this historical background, I draw out three features which form part of the landscape upon which brainwashing was able to take root: the unreliability of the visual register in accepting surface impressions as strong evidence of a person’s essence; a binary approach to demarcating space and rights; and the importance of captivity, containment, or segregation for creating the conditions in which it is thought acceptable to control the thoughts of a subject. From the Plessy decision to the outbreak of war, Hollywood cinema was deeply implicated in extolling whiteness and marginalising, toxifying, and ignoring blackness. I suggest that some of the discourses²⁹ that were attached to racist narratives, such as invasion, contagion, and miscegenation, found a natural outlet in sensationalised threats of insidious takeover by ideologically infected strangers. The 1956 film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* successfully captures

²⁷ For an account of how this has been one of the defining features of the American war film see: Robert T. Eberwein, ed., *The War Film*, Rutgers Depth of Field Series (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

²⁸ Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*.

²⁹ I use the term *discourse*, and its derivative *discursive* in the sense made famous by Michel Foucault. This endeavours to place statements and concepts into their wider social, cultural, political, and institutional contexts, always stressing the power relationships which are at play. Ian Hacking outlines the benefits of this approach well. He writes: ‘If you hold that a discourse consists in the totality of what is said in some domain, then you go beyond reading the intellectual highs of the heroes of science and you sample what is being said everywhere—including not only the annals of public hygiene but also the broadsheets of the day. You inevitably have to consider who is doing what to whom.’ Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 80.

what had become a dual threat: being amalgamated with another species and the takeover by a foreign ideology.

Homer Plessy and Carriages of Injustice

I began with a discussion of Pink(e)y Johnson's dilemma when she stepped off that fictional train in the segregated South. The train is a vehicle which will make regular appearances throughout this study. The train was a fixture of a number of early films and was at the centre of the probably apocryphal story of the film audience running away from its approaching image. This was how the audience was said to have reacted to the projection of *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de la Ciotate* by Auguste and Louis Lumière in 1896.³⁰ Whether true or not, Andrey Tarkovsky, one of the greatest of all filmmakers, referred to this visceral reaction as 'the moment when cinema was born.'³¹ One of the major boosts that the new format received was when, at the St. Louis Exposition of 1904, George C. Hale built a sideshow in the shape of a railroad car, dressed the ticket collector as a train conductor, and used moving pictures of landscapes outside the train windows to mimic the experience of train travel (further heightened by sounds such as the clanging of bells and rocking motions). Marketed as 'Hale's Tours and Scenes of the World' they were a huge success – Hale himself is said to have made two million dollars in just two years trading – and allowed people to believe they had shared something of the experience of train travel that they were often unable to afford.³²

It also seems sensible to think that one of the experiences that allowed people to read cinema was viewing landscapes through the moving frames of train carriage windows. As the cultural historian Lynne Kirby has shown 'the kind of perception that came to characterize the experience of the passenger on the train became that of the spectator in the cinema.'³³ The railroad opened up vistas of new landscapes, cultures, people, and

³⁰ Eric Grundhauser, 'Did a Silent Film About a Train Really Cause Audiences to Stampede?', *Atlas Obscura*, 31:00 400AD, <http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/did-a-silent-film-about-a-train-really-cause-audiences-to-stampede>.

³¹ Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, 3. Univ. of Texas Pr. ed (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1991), 62.

³² Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History. With an Essay, 'Experimental Cinema in America, 1921–1947.'* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1939), 7–8.

³³ Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema*, Exeter Studies in Film History (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), 7. Kirby's excellent analysis builds on the foundations

markets for those who wanted to extend their experience or commerce; at the same time, it threatened to expose closed communities and small towns to wider networks that some inhabitants wished to resist. My focus here is more specific, albeit informed by these wider strands of influence. The case of Homer Plessy in 1896 was one in which arguments were marshalled for and against the reliability of what we see when we classify a person as a racialised Other.

On 11 January 1897, in the Louisiana Criminal District Court, Homer Plessy pleaded guilty to attempting to board a white car on the East Louisiana Railway and paid a \$25 fine.³⁴ This seemingly innocuous event, which received virtually no press coverage at the time, had a lasting impact on race relations and the structures of institutionalised white supremacy throughout most of the twentieth century. Plessy's offence had occurred over four and a half years earlier but the constitutionality of Louisiana's Separate Car Law passed in 1890, under which he had been charged, was referred to the Supreme Court. On 18 May 1896 the Law was found to be constitutional, asserting that a state could set aside separate services based on race. It established that the distinction between the races was one 'which is found in the color of the two races, and which must always exist as long as white men are distinguished from the other race by color.'³⁵ The irony of this was that the very thing which had led to the misidentification of Homer Plessy – a visual check by the inspector – was to function as the basis for making proper racial distinctions in the future. Plessy had first been allowed to take his seat in the white carriage because he appeared to be white – he was "one-eighth black" – and deliberately initiated the process which would go to the Supreme Court by informing the train's guard of his racial heritage. At the same time as the Court insisted on the visual register as the definitive arbiter of racial difference, the white skin of black Homer Plessy faced them as direct confirmation of the unreliability of that field of reference.

laid by Wolfgang Schivelbusch, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

³⁴ Charles A. Lofgren, *The Plessy Case: A Legal-Historical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 208.

³⁵ Joseph R. Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, *The Social Foundations of Aesthetic Forms* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 236.

Homer Plessy – as a person whose skin colour challenged and complicated the classifications of the day – was hardly a rarity in Louisiana at that time. One of the team who took Plessy's case to the Supreme Court was the journalist and Black rights activist Louis Martinet. He wrote of 'some of the strangest white people you ever saw' walking up and down Louisiana's main thoroughfare, Canal Street (which would be the site of the first public screening of the Vitascope, the forerunner of the cinematograph). He said that 'you would be surprised to have persons pointed out to you, some as white and others as colored, and if you were not informed you would be sure to pick out the white for colored and the colored for white.'³⁶

Commentators such as the historian and chief advisor to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Rayford Logan, have deemed the 1890s the nadir of black American prospects in the USA.³⁷ The decade saw hopes of equality dashed and a determined and sustained effort to reassert white supremacy and ensure that it was a pivot in the structure of twentieth-century America.³⁸ The restriction of the carriages in which black passengers could travel was one such legal enforcement, and had been mandated in the spring of 1890 in New Orleans. The Louisiana legislature passed Act 111, which instructed that the state railroad companies would be required to provide separate carriages for their white and black passengers.³⁹ It was an instruction that the carriages should be of equal comfort, and on that basis it was argued that the separation meant that no person was receiving unfair treatment; that the comfort of each passenger was being looked out for by ensuring that they only had to mix with other passengers of the same race.

A few months later, an official organisation was formed by black New Orleans citizens dedicated to proving the unconstitutionality of the law, the 'Citizens Committee to Test the Constitutionality of the Separate Car Law'. The organisation

³⁶ Amy Robinson, 'Forms of Appearance of Value: Homer Plessy and the Politics of Privacy', in *Performance and Cultural Politics*, ed. Elin Diamond (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 241.

³⁷ Rayford Whittingham. Logan, *Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson*. (New York: Collier Books, 1965). See also Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³⁸ Matthew Pratt Guterl, *The Color of Race in America, 1900–1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5.

³⁹ Eve Exandria Dunbar, 'The Crossroads of Race: Racial Passing, Profiling, and Legal Mobility in Twentieth-Century African American Literature and Culture' (PhD, Austin, Texas, 2004), 19.

worked at times in conjunction with the railroads, who were initially opposed to the act because of the extra costs involved with providing, maintaining, and policing two sets of carriages when in the past a single one would have been sufficient.⁴⁰ The committee went to great lengths to prepare for Plessy's arrest, even arranging for a detective to be on hand so that Plessy could be removed from the train without white passengers taking more direct action.⁴¹ When the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* covered the original case in October 1892, it referred to Plessy as a coloured man and made no mention of the lightness of his skin. It said that Plessy had tried to enter a carriage he was clearly prohibited from travelling in and was stopped by a conductor merely exercising his correct powers. The newspaper referred to the provision of rights as being 'equal but not common', meaning that so long as the facilities were equal in the black carriage, the black passenger had not been discriminated against. If the facilities were not equal, he then had the right of redress.⁴²

This removal of the black body from the white line of sight is a common theme in this study. Segregated spaces meant that black bodies were for the most part invisible; it also meant that the mulatto⁴³ – as a borderline case – could be accepted as white or black depending on where they positioned themselves. The onset of segregation and the subsequent mass incarceration of black bodies demands to be read as a deliberate and sustained attempt to remove black bodies from the white field of vision. As the cultural critic Eve Dunbar writes, 'Constitutionally, Plessy signals the government's post-reconstruction commitment to denying a valued space within the national contract for African American citizens—the case makes black train riders invisible to white train riders.'⁴⁴ She also writes that a black person who passes as white undermines the power of racial detection. Although this may be true in a factual sense, the power of the racial imaginary means that unless the act is found out, it actually only serves to

⁴⁰ Dunbar, 20.

⁴¹ Robinson, 'Forms of Appearance of Value: Homer Plessy and the Politics of Privacy', 239.

⁴² 'Three Louisiana Cases Decided', *The Times-Picayune*, 19 May 1896, 8.

⁴³ This was a widely used word in the first half of the twentieth century. Its provenance is believed to lie in a term for the hybrid offspring of a horse and donkey. It refers in this case to the first generation born from racially diverse parents i.e. black and white. Other terms used in these classifications were "quadroon" for a person of one-quarter black ancestry and "octoroon" for a person of one-eighth black ancestry.

⁴⁴ Dunbar, 'The Crossroads of Race: Racial Passing, Profiling, and Legal Mobility in Twentieth-Century African American Literature and Culture', 127.

sustain the visual regime because the phenomenological experience is one of a white person carrying out a convincing performance of whiteness. The fact that we know that there have been successful passings might make us question the performance of others but it also makes us question our own enactment even if we have never previously thought of our own whiteness as a performance. This is what Daniel Bernardi is highlighting when he says that all white people are performing whiteness.

Zygmunt Bauman's idea of the *familiar stranger*⁴⁵ may help to elucidate why white Americans wished to obliterate the black body from their point of view, and especially those whose features did not clearly mark them as belonging elsewhere. The familiar stranger undermines order by straddling the borderline and creating anxiety in the beholder. Bauman writes:

By their sheer presence, which does not fit easily into any of the established categories, the strangers deny the very validity of the accepted oppositions. They belie the oppositions' 'natural' character, expose their arbitrariness, lay bare their fragility. They show the divisions for what they indeed are: imaginary lines that can be crossed or redrawn.⁴⁶

The critical theorist of modern culture and media Wendy Hui Kyong Chun locates these early practices of segregation as a racial technology which created spatial maps imposing racial differences where they did not previously exist. The train was also the most potent example of modern technology transgressing space, particularly when crossing state lines. Chun also emphasises the disruption of visual expectations and assumptions when middle-class whites encountered well-dressed blacks in the same carriage as them.⁴⁷ Such people needed to be quite literally removed from their sight. The carry-over of this form of language to the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of *brainwashing* is significant. The dictionary speaks of a 'forcible elimination from a

⁴⁵ Also the title of the cultural theorist Stuart Hall's recent posthumously published memoirs: Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

⁴⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Thinking Sociologically: An Introduction for Everyone* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 54.

⁴⁷ Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, 'Introduction: Race and/as Technology; or, How to Do Things to Race', *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 24, no. 1 (70) (1 May 2009): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-2008-013>.

person's mind of all established ideas ... so that another set of ideas may take their place.'⁴⁸

The problem with the strategy used by Plessy's team was that in focusing on the body of their client they were locked into the narrative and concepts they were trying to dismantle.⁴⁹ What I mean by this is that much of the argument ended up sounding like Plessy was claiming his right to declare himself to be white. This has the effect of shoring up the privileges attached to being white. The argument switches from being one about the morally objectionable practice of declaring people to be of lesser or greater value because of the colour of their skin, to one of claiming that the apparent whiteness of Plessy's skin should have meant that he was given access to the white carriage, with all of the benefits that accrued. The essential question was one of whether the race of a person is written on the skin. If we take Plessy's performance to be one of a passing deliberately forestalled, then, as the cultural theorist Amy Robinson declares: 'As a strategy of entrance into a field of representation, the social practice of passing is thoroughly invested in the logic of the system it attempts to subvert.'⁵⁰ In other words, to successfully perform as white is to assert that there is a way of being white which is manifested in particular behaviours and practices not available to those who are deemed non-white. This also suggests that the reliability of skin colour as a marker of whiteness was already being questioned and that a more performative test was equally, if not more, important.

In the screen version of the novel *Quality*, titled after the heroine *Pinky* (1949), the eponymous character asks her white patient:

What am I then? You tell me. You're the ones that set the standards, you whites. You're the ones who judge people by the colour of their skins. Well by your own standards, by the only ones that matter to you I'm as white as you are. That's why you all hate me. What should I do? Dye my face? Grovel and

⁴⁸ The American Merriam-Webster dictionary refers to 'a forcible indoctrination ... to accept contrasting regimented ideas.'

⁴⁹ Plessy's attorney in the case was Albion Tourgée, author of a book *A Fool's Errand and the Invisible Empire*, that ironically would be quoted by D.W. Griffith as a historical source for his film in the intertitles of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Melvyn Stokes, *D.W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation: A History of 'the Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time'* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 192.

⁵⁰ Robinson, 'Forms of Appearance of Value: Homer Plessy and the Politics of Privacy', 237.

shovel? Say yas-em and no-em. Marry some man like Jake Waters? Carry a razor in my stocking so I won't upset you?

What Pinky Johnson shared with Homer Plessy was the ability to disturb the visual register which had been created around the black epidermis as the most reliable marker of racial heritage. Pinky and Plessy each appear to be white to anyone looking at them and can only be seen as black either when they inform the white observer that is the case or when they have placed themselves in a context where they can only be seen as black.

Again, the instability of the visual register will be confirmed the next time that Plessy boards a train. He should place himself in the black carriage even though a visual check would place him elsewhere. If he goes to the white carriage and comports himself in such a way that he makes the journey unmolested, the visual register has not operated successfully according to the racial classifications of the day since he should not have been sitting there. And yet, if Plessy is seen as a white man, and acts as a white man is expected to behave, then he has only served to cement the reliability of the visual register. The success of the pass requires the move to continue in perpetuity.

The American Melting Pot

The enactment of segregation practices into law meant that organisations, services, and cultural providers, were forced or chose to function in a binary manner when it came to race. In the South, most citizens had to place themselves, or be channelled towards, one of two racial spaces: that might be the back of the bus, a particular car in the train, or a separate zoo or park. This was an important driver in bringing together various ethnicities and nationalities under the rubric of the white American in the early part of the twentieth century. This often took a hostile and aggressive shape, with President Woodrow Wilson particularly targeting those who wished to retain a 'hyphenate' such as Italian-American or Irish-American. In 1915, speaking before the Daughters of the American Revolution, he wondered whether hyphenates had 'entertained with sufficient intensity and affection the American ideal.'⁵¹ He even proposed that a little harassment of them might not be a bad thing, if it served to encourage them to live their lives as total rather than incomplete Americans.

⁵¹ 'Hazing the Hyphenates', *New York Times*, 13 October 1915, 14.

In 1914 the motor manufacturer Henry Ford established the Ford English School for his European factory workers as part of a project of Americanising European immigrants. The graduation ceremony for those passing the tests was striking in its symbolism: a long column of students descended into a huge melting pot from backstage. They each wore clothing associated with their country of origin but when they emerged, they all wore identical suits and each carried a small American flag.⁵² The ceremony was in many ways a model of the production of the cars which Ford was manufacturing, with separate assembly lines working together to create a unified output.



Figure 1: Melting Pot Ceremony at Ford English School, July 4, 1917.

Irish-Americans and Italian-Americans were only recently embraced as part of the white majority. Irish immigrants were discriminated against and provoked claims that they would adversely affect American stock after thousands of them escaped to the

⁵² Hee-Jung Serenity Joo, 'Miscegenation, Assimilation, and Consumption: Racial Passing in George Schuyler's "Black No More" and Eric Liu's "The Accidental Asian"', *MELUS* 33, no. 3 (2008): 175.

New World following the Irish potato famine of 1845 and 1846. Similar accusations were made against Italian immigrants when they became the largest group to arrive in America towards the end of the century. They were linked with black Americans and Mexican Americans, and sometimes referred to as the ‘Chinese of Europe.’⁵³ However, they were nevertheless treated as superior to black Americans: they were eligible for citizenship and were allowed to vote. Many Irish-Americans voiced vehemently anti-black sentiment as a means of proving and cementing their own whiteness.⁵⁴ This served to weaken potential alliances between poor immigrants and black Americans, thus reducing the threats of organised labour against plantation owners and emerging industrialists.⁵⁵

Curiously, Sarah Churchwell, in her notable book *Behold America* (2018), neglects to mention cinema as one of the tools of de-hyphenation. However, others have remarked on the adhesive social qualities of cinema, among them the film theorist Lewis Jacobs. He described how the movies gave the newcomers, particularly, ‘a respect for American law and order, an understanding of civic organization, pride in citizenship and in the American commonwealth. ... More vividly than any other single agency they revealed the social topography of America to the immigrant, to the poor, and to the country folk.’⁵⁶ It is true that the silence of early film gave hope to some that it could become a universal language. In this idealised form, it would supposedly transcend rather than bolster ethnicity. The film historian Miriam Hansen acknowledges this utopian ideal that sought to bring together otherwise diverse cultures, but admits that what won through was ‘the subsumption of all diversity in the standardised idiom of the culture industry, monopolistically *distributed* from above.’⁵⁷ In other words, the movie industry reflected and cemented the work which was done by interwar eugenicists. An idealised notion of whiteness was created, which demanded to be nurtured and winnowed, by pushing the non-white to the margins or beyond the frame.

⁵³ Erika Lee, *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States*, First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2019), Chapter 4: The Inferior Races of Europe.

⁵⁴ Lee, Chapter 2: ‘Americans Must Rule America’.

⁵⁵ See David R. Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

⁵⁶ Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film*, 12.

⁵⁷ Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 76.

This idealisation of whiteness took place at the same time as a range of academics and popular writers were claiming that the “pure” white American (ideally of Anglo-Saxon or Nordic stock) was under threat because of immigration from southern and eastern Europe, as well as internal migration from the South to the North. This received its most famous elaboration in Madison Grant’s 1916 work *The Passing of the Great Race*. Grant was of course not the first to issue warnings about the degenerative effects of racial mixing.⁵⁸ As the historian Matthew Frye Jacobson suggests, what made Grant’s pronouncements seem more urgent were the shifts in population already taking place and the promise of further displacements because of greater mobility.⁵⁹ The eugenicist ideals of Grant and his colleague Lothrop Stoddard were endorsed by a host of influential thinkers and policymakers including President Warren G. Harding. Grant was a key figure in the drafting of the National Origins Act of 1924, which pinned immigration quotas to the 1890 census in a deliberate strategy to prioritise immigration from Anglo-Saxon and Nordic countries. Immigration from elsewhere was posited as exposing the country to the threat of invasion and infection. Grant described Polish Jews in New York as an insidious threat to the established community. They ‘adopt the language of the native American; they wear his clothes; they steal his name; and they are beginning to take his women, but they seldom adopt his religion or understand his ideals.’⁶⁰ The sociologist Harry Laughlin was equally instrumental in the drafting of the Act, and he fretted about the impact of Mediterranean immigrants, likening them to the smartest breeds of rats who gradually insinuate themselves into a host population and breed with them a few at a time until they have become the dominant strain.⁶¹ Similar fears of the foreigner managing to disguise animalistic dirt and degeneracy so that they could invisibly take over were voiced by Thurman Rice, author of *Racial Hygiene* (1929). He spoke of how those with

⁵⁸ In 1855 the French aristocrat Joseph Arthur de Gobineau had published *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*. Gobineau asserted that the white Aryan race was the clear superior civilization, but it was one with a weakness: the propensity to be attracted to Asian and black women, and thus, through race-mixing, bring about the degeneracy of the Aryan race. See Gregory Blue, ‘Gobineau on China: Race Theory, the “Yellow Peril,” and the Critique of Modernity’, *Journal of World History* 10, no. 1 (1999): 93–139.

⁵⁹ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 95.

⁶⁰ Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race; or, The Racial Basis of European History* (New York: C. Scribner, 1916), 81.

⁶¹ Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 85.

‘defective germ plasma’ might use soap and disinfecting agents to hide their dirt but that this would do nothing to change their lousy nature, which would be transmitted to the next generation.⁶²

These images matter for this thesis because they demonstrate the fears pertaining to race and the instability of the visual register. The white Anglo-Saxon or Nordic fear of the black mulatto, and the dirty eastern or southern European, was that they would be able to cover up their inherited and inescapable identity in order to take over the bloodline of the rightful host of American soil. What is also significant is that given the demands for declarations of loyalty by eugenicists, violently supported by the resurgent Ku Klux Klan, immigrants showed enthusiasm for assimilation – so much so that the racial classifications of 1924 began to disappear. As Jacobson stresses, because the Act ‘was founded upon a racial logic borrowed from biology and eugenics ... the civic story of assimilation (the process by which the Irish, Russian Jews, Poles, and Greeks became Americans) is inseparable from the cultural story of racial alchemy (the process by which Celts, Hebrews, Slavs, and Mediterraneans became Caucasians).’⁶³

One of the main ways in which the Irish, Jews, Poles, and Greeks became Americans during the interwar period, this thesis contends, was through attending the same cinemas as a unified audience, laughing at the same jokes, desiring the same material goods, fantasising over the same stars, and sharing the same animosity towards the same celluloid enemies. The idea of the melting pot was something which was most celebrated on the screen in the 1940s, often on the battlefield or the home front, but the melting actually took place in pre-World War II cinema. As the audience shared the experience on screen, previously distinctive ethnic identities were eroded, except when it came to “blacks”, “yellows”, and “reds”, where differences were heightened, sometimes through directly negative portrayals but more often because of a screen absence. Importantly, the whiteness that was idealised on the screen was just that, an ideal but unreal whiteness that could only be aspired to, and was therefore as out of reach for the Swedish American as it was for the Greek American.⁶⁴

⁶² Jacobson, 85.

⁶³ Jacobson, 8.

⁶⁴ For a good psychoanalytic and technical account of the processes at play here, see Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema*, The SUNY Series in Postmodern Culture (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

The American Creed

It is impossible to speak of American racial attitudes in the aftermath of World War II without setting them in the context of Gunnar Myrdal's monumental study, launched as an initial project in 1938 and completed in 1944, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. Twenty years after it was published, the *Saturday Review* asked a group of intellectuals to name the books they thought had exerted the biggest impact on American society during the past forty years. Only John Maynard Keynes's *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* received more votes.⁶⁵ The overarching conclusion of Myrdal's study was that there was a dangerous gap between the values of equality and democracy enshrined in the American Creed and the actual treatment of its black population. The solution to this, according to Myrdal, resided in altering the views held by the white majority. He was clear about the importance of this for America's standing in the world. He spoke of the need 'to demonstrate to the world that American Negroes can be satisfactorily integrated into its democracy.'⁶⁶ Its success in doing so would decide 'whether the Negro shall remain her liability or become her opportunity.'⁶⁷

Myrdal contended that black Americans had an overwhelming desire to imitate white culture and that it was 'to the advantage of American Negroes as individuals and as a group to become assimilated into American culture, to acquire the traits held in esteem by the dominant white Americans.'⁶⁸ Given this desire on the part of blacks, Myrdal was confident that a programme of social engineering could address the problems caused by white racism. In his own words: 'To find the practical formulas for this never-ending reconstruction of society is the supreme task of social science.'⁶⁹ And what did this mean for black Americans? Because they were motivated by a desire to mimic the white majority, a change in the attitudes of white Americans was framed as sufficient to allow for their assimilation. But as Ralph Ellison asked in an unpublished review of Myrdal's book, 'can a people ... live and develop for over three hundred

⁶⁵ David Southern, *Gunnar Myrdal and Black-White Relations: The Use and Abuse of An American Dilemma: 1944–69* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), xiv.

⁶⁶ Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 1016.

⁶⁷ Myrdal, 1022.

⁶⁸ Myrdal, 929.

⁶⁹ Myrdal, 1024.

years simply by *reacting*?⁷⁰ If a black person is nothing more than the outcome of the actions of a group of whites, what agency does such a person really have? In a piece written in 1946 but not published until 1953, Ellison claimed that since the end of slavery, black Americans had undergone ‘a process of institutionalised dehumanisation.’⁷¹ Although white Americans were not inclined to question their own humanity, emerging concerns about identity and social control would lead many of them to ponder their own capacity as free agents.⁷² Indeed, the changes wrought by Myrdal’s study were soon picked on by fretful white supremacists as evidence of an attempt by the federal government to control the minds of young Americans.

Myrdal’s study was frequently quoted in legislative cases brought by the NAACP to call for desegregated schooling. Southern educators and politicians increasingly referred to this as an example of brainwashing. When the Supreme Court ruled in favour of *Brown v. Board of Education* on 17 May 1954, state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students were deemed to be unconstitutional. Mississippi senator James O. Eastland was one of the most vociferous opponents, and he immediately accused the Court of being ‘brainwashed by left-wing pressure groups.’⁷³ He also had Gunnar Myrdal in his sights, using his position as a member of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS) to allege that *An American Dilemma* had been written by ‘an alien who advocates the destruction of the American form of government.’⁷⁴ This line of attack was taken up by Southern educators, especially by E. Merrill Root, a Quaker educator from Richmond, Indiana whose attacks on the indoctrination of children culminated in *Brainwashing in the High Schools* (1958).⁷⁵ A

⁷⁰ Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 315.

⁷¹ Ellison, 29.

⁷² The idea that the postwar individual’s agency was compromised as never before was prevalent across the political spectrum. Ayn Rand and Ralph Ellison represented this in novelistic form. See Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (New York: Penguin Group, 1943). Ellison, *Invisible Man*. Approaches modelled on the social sciences were written and widely discussed by, among others: David Riesman, Reuel Denney, and Nathan Glazer, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1950). C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*. (New York: OUP, 1951). William Hollingsworth Whyte, *The Organisation Man* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1956).

⁷³ Paul Healy, ‘High Court “Brainwashed”: Eastland’, *New York Daily News*, 28 May 1954, 482.

⁷⁴ John E. Reinecke, ‘Eastland in His Own Words’, *Honolulu Record* 9, no. 12 (18 October 1956): 2.

⁷⁵ E. Merrill Root, *Brainwashing in the High Schools, An Examination of Eleven American History Textbooks* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1958). For more on the intersection of education, race, and

Southern newspaper column of the same year attacked an illustrated children's story *The Rabbits' Wedding*, featuring a black male rabbit marrying a white female, as a form of brainwashing.⁷⁶

This would have come as no surprise to Myrdal who made it clear during the course of his study that it was the fear of miscegenation which was the key to understanding the structure of racism in America. It is for this reason that the issue cannot be approached as one of class; the boundary between white and black is a fixed line which is designed to be a permanent barrier between the black man and the white woman.⁷⁷ The idea of miscegenation is supposed to be repugnant to the white person, something which goes against all instinct – even if most evidence in the South implied the very opposite of this. Nevertheless, the insistence of its repugnance remains, so that the instant response to talk of civil rights is to ask how it would feel for your sister or daughter to marry a black man.⁷⁸ It is an obsession which Myrdal likens to 'a manifestation of the most primitive form of religion.' The idea of "Negro blood" is, says Myrdal, rejected as if it were an overwhelming disease. This is irrational, even magical thinking. Because it has no foundation in reality this idea of the Negro becomes a container for the opposites of the positive attributes of whiteness. And, as Myrdal argues, this also makes it inevitable that the black person is an existential danger to the white man's virtue and social order. Through an enforcement of segregation, white Americans are quarantining what is evil, shameful, and feared in society.⁷⁹

Film as a Research Tool

As noted earlier, this thesis focuses on a range of films as part of a larger argument about the role of postwar film in the context of American debates about race and identity. I have deliberately opted to use film as a crucial and central primary source

brainwashing as a gathering nexus during the 1950s see Phoebe Godfrey, 'Bayonets, Brainwashing, and Bathrooms: The Discourse of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Desegregation of Little Rock's Central High', *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2003): 42–67. Clive Webb, 'A Continuity of Conservatism: The Limitations of Brown v. Board of Education', *The Journal of Southern History* 70, no. 2 (May 2004): 327–36. For a wider story that covers the role of Eastland in depth see Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

⁷⁶ Henry Balch, 'Hush Puppies', *Orlando Sentinel*, 18 May 1959, 8-B.

⁷⁷ Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 58–60.

⁷⁸ Myrdal, 55.

⁷⁹ Myrdal, 100.

in this thesis. It is important therefore to remark here briefly on film as a research tool in historical analysis. Sian Barber sets out the case for the use of film as a source of historical information neatly and convincingly. She writes:

Film and moving image can help us probe the delicate relationship between culture and society, between film and audience, and between spectators and the text. The films that are consumed by a society, the film stars venerated and the preferred genres, as well as the trends in performance style, cinematography and costume, can all shed light on preoccupations of audiences in past decades.⁸⁰

Or, as film theorist Maarten Pereboom puts it, a film can be ‘at one and the same time an artefact and an interpretation’.⁸¹ Film does not map precisely using the coordinates of primary and secondary sources. A film can reflect a prevailing social attitude at the same time as reinforcing it. Barber acknowledges that the nature of film means that it can easily be dismissed as an unreliable source of historical evidence, but this, she argues, is to ignore the fact that any kind of source is potentially flawed and misleading. Movies have to be treated with the same rigour as any other source.⁸² It is a creation ‘in imaginative terms [of] what appears as living history.’⁸³ This thesis argues that film should be approached with an eye to uncover forms of truth; these might be historical, sociological, political, or psychological. Whichever it might be, the films require a different treatment to more traditional historical archives. We should not look at them in the same way as we look at government documents, for example. The artifice of the medium means that we look to them as rich condensations of prevailing cultural attitudes, prejudices, and preoccupations. This is more clearly the case for fiction films than it is for documentaries, but as I will show with *Let There Be Light* (1946), the line between the two is not always easy to draw. I treat films as cultural and material productions which grew out of specific intellectual, political, and ideological contexts.

The clearest exposition of why film should be placed front and centre as a research tool, specifically for America around the mid-twentieth century, is provided by the

⁸⁰ Sian Barber, *Using Film as a Source*, IHR Research Guides (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 1.

⁸¹ Maarten L. Pereboom, *History and Film: Moving Pictures and the Study of the Past*, 1st ed (Boston, MA: Prentice Hall, 2011), 5.

⁸² Barber, *Using Film as a Source*, 14.

⁸³ Melvyn Stokes, *American History through Hollywood Film: From the Revolution to the 1960s* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 5.

sociologist Norman K. Denzin. Among the many books Denzin has written on qualitative research and ethnography are a handful of works on the cinema and its key role in the construction of American social forms and norms. He writes that America in the twentieth century was ‘a visual, cinematic age; it knows itself in part through the reflections that flow from the camera’s eye.’⁸⁴ Denzin claims that the cinematic apparatus introduced into American society new methods of proof and verification that were based on pictures and images and that these should be linked to valorised ideas of the pragmatic, making ‘its ways of knowing and verifying truth, a central part of the American way of life.’⁸⁵ It is what Denzin terms ‘the cinematic gaze’ and he argues that this structures larger American culture. It is a gaze which, ‘visual and auditory to the core, instantiates and defines the medical, psychiatric, military, criminological, ethnographic, journalistic and scientific gazes that Foucault locates at the centre of today’s disciplinary societies.’⁸⁶ This cinematic gaze, then, is also critical in forming and containing the gender and race biases that permeate society. Denzin has used films as a primary research tool to conduct a sociological study of alcoholism in *Hollywood Shot by Shot: Alcoholism in American Cinema* (1991)⁸⁷ and of racial violence in *Reading Race: Hollywood and the Cinema of Racial Violence* (2002).⁸⁸ I similarly employ film as a primary source of material and place it in both a cultural and sociological context.

Structure of Thesis

This thesis highlights the confused, toxic, irrational, anxious, and Manichaeian imagery floating around the idea of race in America in the late 1940s and early 1950s, above all in American film. It suggests that the fears generated by the new concept of brainwashing were strikingly similar to those which had earlier been attached to miscegenation. When people were asked to look for signs of communist behaviour on the part of returning prisoners, this was a dialogue familiar from looking for signs of racial impurities on the part of strangers entering predominately white communities.

⁸⁴ Norman K. Denzin, *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur’s Gaze*, Theory, Culture & Society (London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 1.

⁸⁵ Denzin, 6.

⁸⁶ Denzin, 15.

⁸⁷ Norman K. Denzin, *Hollywood Shot by Shot: Alcoholism in American Cinema* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991).

⁸⁸ Norman K. Denzin, *Reading Race: Hollywood and the Cinema of Racial Violence*, Theory, Culture & Society (London ; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2002).

The communist was someone who had to be isolated and segregated, preferably deported. But what if, as with the light-skinned mulatto, the communist could not be recognised? What if they performed so well as good Americans that they were invited into the school, the hospital, even the bedroom? What was unsettling about the return of the prisoner from Korea was that a foreign body might have performed some unspeakable act upon him. This could have erased his national identity and turned him into something monstrous – but only under the skin. Just like the mulatto, their desire to invade and contaminate was not obvious and called for rigorous surveillance and alertness to signs.

This research was motivated by questions as to why the concept of brainwashing took hold in mid-century America and the resonances in contemporaneous discourses relating to race and identity. The study therefore encompasses a range of newspaper, magazine, and journal articles during the World War II and postwar years. The journalist Edward Hunter has successfully promoted himself as the originator of the phrase, and his two books *Brain-Washing in Red China* (1951) and *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied It* (1956) are important works.⁸⁹ However, they are significant more because of the language and concepts employed within them than for any usefulness for understanding what actual practices of brainwashing might amount to. I have not been concerned to fully explore here the wealth of material available on the empirical history of brainwashing in America. The machinations of the CIA and the clandestine operations they carried out have fascinated scholars, journalists, novelists, and filmmakers from John Marks's *The Search for the 'Manchurian Candidate'* (1978) to Stephen Kinzer's recent *Poisoner in Chief* (2019).⁹⁰ The literature which has inspired this research has been more recent and has been concerned with what the fascination with brainwashing revealed about America and its global relationships in the second half of the twentieth century. The literary scholar Timothy Melley should be credited with kickstarting some of this research in his *Empire of Conspiracy* (1999), which stressed the similarities between brainwashing narratives and an increasing appetite for paranoia

⁸⁹ Edward Hunter, *Brain-Washing in Red China: The Calculated Destruction of Men's Minds*. (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951). Edward Hunter, *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied It* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1958).

⁹⁰ John Marks, *The Search for the 'Manchurian Candidate': The CIA and Mind Control* (New York: Times Books, 1979). Stephen Kinzer, *Poisoner in Chief: Sidney Gottlieb and the CIA Search for Mind Control*, 2019.

and conspiracy.⁹¹ A clutch of scholars, including Andreas Killen, Stefan Andriopoulos, Rebecca Lemov, and the late Alison Winter have built on this work in various directions and all contributed to an invaluable edition of the journal *Grey Room* published in the autumn of 2011. Susan Carruthers's *Cold War Captives* (2009) has informed this research with its thoughtful analysis of the importance of captivity narratives in informing American ideas of its identity since “settling” the continent.⁹² Carruthers shows how this was a vital ingredient in the allegations of brainwashing in the Korean War and the heightened reactions they provoked. Although she does touch on the significance of race in this history, this thesis goes further in claiming that the capture and conversion of the black body has been central to that history.

There is a burgeoning awareness in the field of visual culture research of the long and knotted ties between agencies of government, military, academy, industry, and the various manifestations of cinema in the twentieth century. Such ties have been central to many technological changes, such as depth-of-field photography and widescreen cinema, alongside audience research and propaganda uses. The recent essays collected in *Cinema's Military Industrial Complex* (2018) are a rich compilation of such research.⁹³ Most of the contributors in this book focus on what has recently been labelled ‘useful cinema’, a term which grew out of an edited book of the same name from 2011.⁹⁴ This has been defined as ‘a *deployment* of particular technologies, forms, practices, and spaces that have coalesced as “cinema” to forward particular social, economic, and political objectives.’⁹⁵ Many of the films from this genre were made by organisations or as collaborations between unnamed technicians and thus provoke different responses to commercial films with a named creator. Here, particularly with auteurist theories – which arose in the late 1940s – it is the intent and stylistic hallmarks of the director which are privileged. With useful cinema, as the name suggests, it is the uses to which the films were put, and the effects which they had on viewers, which are of prime concern. This means that the literature covering this period often falls into two

⁹¹ Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America*. (Ithaca, NY; Wantage: Cornell University Press; University Presses Marketing, 1999).

⁹² Susan Carruthers, *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing*.

⁹³ Haidee Wasson and Lee Grieveson, eds., *Cinema's Military Industrial Complex* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

⁹⁴ Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Useful Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁹⁵ Wasson and Grieveson, *Cinema's Military Industrial Complex*, 3.

categories: on the one hand, books such as Mark Harris's *Five Came Back* (2014), which provides a compelling, entertaining, and well-researched account of the wartime contributions of five of Hollywood's biggest directors; and on the other hand, forensically researched accounts of specialist film units, such as Noah Tsika's recent history of military psychiatry films, *Traumatic Imprints*.⁹⁶ This study looks at both commercial and training films, and approaches them in a similar way. Although a film such as *Pinky*, with its budget, stars, and audience, is a very different creature from an army training film encouraging a violent response to the enemy (*Kill or Be Killed* (1943)), they do share many features: intended audience impact, use of narrative, use of cinematography, and reference to other cultural artefacts, among others. They are also part of a wider effect which is often missed in analysing individual films. The soldiers who watched a series of training films on how to load a rifle, how to understand the causes of World War II, and how to avoid venereal disease, who then viewed a Hollywood movie, were becoming immersed in film. They were also associating the screen with knowledge, direction, and the prescribed.

There is a growing body of work considering the interactions between race and cinema in the post-war period. Recent contributions cover some similar ground to this thesis but with different emphases. Ellen C. Scott's *Cinema Civil Rights* (2015)⁹⁷ provides great detail of the complicated network of negotiations and compromises that went into the making and viewing of films about race, and N. Megan Kelley's *Projections of Passing* (2016)⁹⁸ suggests that fears and suspicion around passing (mainly on the part of whites) shared features with the alleged threat of the communist. Elizabeth Reich's *Militant Visions* (2016)⁹⁹ focuses on black soldiers and their representation in American cinema. Reich provides a powerful counter-reading of the landmark race film *Home of the Brave*. In 2016, Scott Selisker also had published an extensive account of brainwashing and its connections with ideas of American exceptionalism, *Human*

⁹⁶ Mark Harris, *Five Came Back: A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2014). Noah Tsika, *Traumatic Imprints: Cinema, Military Psychiatry, and the Aftermath of War* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

⁹⁷ Ellen C. Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights: Regulation, Repression, and Race in the Classical Hollywood Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

⁹⁸ N. Megan Kelley, *Projections of Passing: Postwar Anxieties and Hollywood Films, 1947–1960* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016).

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Reich, *Militant Visions: Black Soldiers, Internationalism, and the Transformation of American Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016).

Programming (2016).¹⁰⁰ Selisker employs Erich Fromm's figure of the human automaton to explore brainwashing and totalitarianism. The human automaton has obvious links with the zombie and thus with slavery. This thesis covers similar territory but the structure of racism is more central to its argument. These works have informed and challenged some of my original thinking. Where this thesis offers new knowledge, though, is in its evidence for the crucial place of captivity, race, and cinema for the emerging idea of brainwashing. This is a nexus which has not been previously suggested and has meant bringing together an eclectic range of sources.

Part One of this thesis comprises two chapters which explore first, the long history of racialised politics, representations, and struggles in America; second, the shorter history of the advent of brainwashing as a concept and as an alleged practice in Korea. What holds these two chapters together is the importance of images and metaphors of captivity as a precondition for the manipulation of minds. Practices of captivity, and associated ideas of superiority and subjugation, have been a constant feature of white supremacist policies in American history. This was explicit during slavery, and it is why I have highlighted segregation as a continuation, albeit as an adaptation, of this captive state: a control of where black bodies were allowed to be, and a range of official and de facto punishments for real and perceived transgressions. Given the equation I have already stressed between the brainwashed person and the slave, it was entirely appropriate that the first accusations of the practice being carried out on Americans should have been in overseas prison camps. I show the importance of the captive body to the racialisation of the subject and the licence given to wipe, deny, or control the thoughts of the captured person. It is beyond the scope of this study, but the disproportionate incarceration of black people since the dismantling of segregation is an obvious further example of this.¹⁰¹ And this is why the imprisonment of American soldiers in Korea allowed for sensational stories of brainwashing practices to gain traction. Within the camps, people were separated and differently treated according to racist expectations, and similar assumptions underscored attempts to convert prisoners' minds. American history was replete with conversion stories, most of them

¹⁰⁰ Scott Selisker, *Human Programming: Brainwashing, Automaton, and American Unfreedom* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

¹⁰¹ For more see Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). Sharon Shalev, *Supermax: Controlling Risk through Solitary Confinement* (Portland, Oregon: Willan, 2009).

forced, such as proud Indians and Africans reduced to infantile dependence; some of them persuaded, such as immigrants encouraged to renounce their hyphenated identity. I suggest that the racialised practices which materialised in these settings have been underplayed in historical accounts.

During this first part of the thesis I draw on the 1961 study of brainwashing in China, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* by the American psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton. I make particular use of the eight features which he sees as being typical of totalistic regimes and environments. I address these as offering a useful framework to consider two ways in which brainwashing techniques could apply to black and white Americans in different ways. I argue that the institution of slavery was in many ways a template for brainwashing with the wiping of a person's past and the regression to a state of absolute dependency on a master. But I also claim that the systemic racism, which featured at every level of American society during the period of this study, depended on the white majority seeing some of their fellow citizens in an irrational, illogical way. The maintenance of such a system required the conditioning of people at an early age and the construction of physical and intellectual networks that would buttress the central ideology of white supremacy and anti-miscegenation. But the preservation of this system, and pattern of thought, is not without pain. Ellison emphasises how it is a pain charged by guilt, requiring a

ceaseless effort expended to dull its throbbing with the anaesthesia of legend, myth, hypnotic ritual and narcotic modes of thinking. And not only have our popular culture, our newspapers, radio and cinema been devoted to justifying the Negro's condition and the conflict created thereby, but even our social sciences and serious literature have been conscripted — all in the effort to drown out the persistent voice of outraged conscience.¹⁰²

Ellison here sees the role of media, social sciences and academia as twofold: it both pushes the idea of the Negro as inferior and serves to dull the guilty pain which is always threatening the white person's conscience. In Part Two I look at the role of cinema in this complex set of arrangements.

The second part of the thesis is made up of five chapters, all focused on exploring the ability of cinema to persuade audiences to see and act in the world in particular ways. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the social and cultural development of film in

¹⁰² Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 99.

the first half of the twentieth century. I pay particular attention to its contribution to the creation and sustenance of myths and stereotypes designed to keep black Americans in a subservient position. The next four chapters then examine a range of films made between 1944 and 1949, all of which in some way contributed to cementing, or attempting to change, the racist productions Hollywood had previously delivered. Although race is a theme which runs throughout these chapters, each has a different prism through which it is viewed. It looks in turn at how four groups were to be accommodated in postwar America: the black American, Asians, the returning veteran (especially those classified as having particular psychological issues), and women.

It begins with a film that was made to address the contribution of black Americans to the country's war and its history. *The Negro Soldier* (1944), directed by Anatole Litvak, was called 'the most remarkable Negro film ever flashed on the American screen' by the poet Langston Hughes.¹⁰³ The chapter questions though how far this single film made with a clear purpose was able to dismantle any of the deeper and embedded racist structures of Hollywood and wider society. I draw attention to the general absence of black characters which meant that efforts such as Litvak's documentary could only have limited impact.

Chapter 6 discusses the malleability of racism; that is to say the changeable nature of its object or target. The main film used here in evidence is the 1945 production *First Yank into Tokyo*, directed by Gordon Douglas. The chapter considers representations of the Japanese following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. It shows how the Japanese were portrayed in ways that were strikingly similar to the racist portrayals and stereotypes also used in characterisations of black Americans. At the same time, the Chinese were shown as a separate race who were worthy of friendship and respect. This was in contrast to the blanket conglomeration and exoticisation of the Asian Other or "Oriental"¹⁰⁴ that was typical in American popular culture before the war. I also

¹⁰³ Truman K. Gibson and Steve Huntley, *Knocking down Barriers: My Fight for Black America* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 149.

¹⁰⁴ I use this term while acknowledging its difficulties. President Obama actually signed a bill in 2016 prohibiting its use in all federal documents and Erika Lee describes how it has been used to make diverse Asian peoples into one monolithic group. See Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), Introduction. However, it does capture how people from China, Japan, and Korea were seen as largely interchangeable during this period, and also something of their supposed exoticism. I use it advisedly, with the intention of drawing out these extant connections. For a counterview to that of Obama and Lee, see Jayne

show how Douglas's production, along with Edward Dmytryk's earlier *Behind the Rising Sun* (1943), acknowledge how film can be used to uncover truths but also to create and cement lies.

Chapter 7 analyses John Huston's *Let There Be Light* alongside other films which were made on the subject of psychiatric treatments and recoveries during the war. It emphasises their racial discourse and exclusions and the surrounding debates on their impact on the army, the government, psychiatry, veterans, and mothers. It also suggests that the techniques of a rudimentary psychoanalytic approach combined with the use of drugs and hypnosis could be viewed as a model for brainwashing.

Chapter 8 returns to several of the arguments with which the thesis began, namely the instability of race as a visual signifier, and the complicity of film in racist stereotyping. Its focus is the 1949 film of *Pinky* directed by Elia Kazan. This was by some way the most lavish and popular production of any of the films considered in this thesis. It is also the one film, from my selected examples, uniquely concerned with female identity and performativity. I suggest here the remarkable role this film played in asserting the power of women in a world organised for the material benefit of white men. Again though, as with the earlier *The Negro Soldier*, the film is contextualised as working against an overwhelming cinema history that demeaned and diminished black people; and the race cycle of which it was a part, is shown to have had little effect on the overall visibility of black characters and the telling of black stories.

The conclusion then underlines the key themes and arguments that have run through the thesis and shows how they add to our understanding of brainwashing, racism, and the uses to which film can be put. It also returns to the intermittent psychoanalytical narrative that appears in the thesis as a way of pulling this expansive material together.

Tsuchiyama, 'The Term "Oriental" Is Outdated, but Is It Racist?', *Los Angeles Times*, 1 June 2016, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-tsuchiyama-oriental-insult-20160601-snap-story.html>.

*Race applied to human beings is a **political** division: it is a system of governing people ...
based on invented biological demarcations.*
Dorothy Roberts¹

Part One

Domination Ends at the Scalp: Race and Brainwashing

¹ Dorothy E Roberts, *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-Create Race in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: New Press, 2011), x.

Chapter 2 – American History and Race

The conundrum of color is the inheritance of every American.
James Baldwin¹

Philosopher David Jenkins recently wrote that ‘The chasm separating white from black in the United States is not some mistake made along the way; rather, it is the defining feature of that nation and the character of its people.’² Jenkins wrote these words in an attempt to incorporate the observations made by author and civil rights activist James Baldwin into a philosophy of recognition. Such a philosophy is rooted in treating human interdependence as a primary ontological fact.³ In a 1968 speech in London, Baldwin made a similar point in a more lyrical manner: ‘No white American is sure he’s white and every American Negro is visibly no longer in Africa.’ He went on: ‘The American people are unable to face the fact that I am flesh of their flesh, bone of their bone, created by them; my blood, my father’s blood, is in that soil. They can’t face that.’⁴ This was also an echo of the question posed by W.E.B. Du Bois: ‘Would America have been America without her Negro people?’⁵

Du Bois also famously referred to the twentieth century as the century of the colour line and these ideas of lines, demarcations, and boundaries are a feature of this chapter. It is worth here considering the titles of the films that were released in 1949, which act as a pivot for this thesis. Apart from the eponymously titled *Pinky*, all contain some reference to territory or trespass: *Home of the Brave*, *Lost Boundaries*, *Intruder in the Dust*, and *No Way Out*. Plantation slavery meant that most black Americans had been effectively imprisoned. The onset of Reconstruction in 1867 and the increasing mobility of new technologies made it easier for bodies and ideas to cross lines and enter communities. The insistence on racial segregation which grew in the 1890s was, among other things, an enforcement of the regime of visibility that would have applied to

¹ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955).

² David Jenkins, ‘James Baldwin and Recognition’, *American Political Thought: A Journal of Ideas, Institutions, and Culture* 8 (Winter 2019): 88.

³ Jenkins, 84.

⁴ Horace Ové, *Baldwin’s N-----* (BFI Video, 1968).

⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, IL: A.C. McClurg & co, 1903), 263.

slaves in earlier times. In other words, an attempt to control, when, where, how, and if, black bodies were to be seen by the white majority.

This chapter demonstrates the continuity between practices of slavery and the use of segregation and lynching to manage the presence and visibility of black bodies in the twentieth century. It also emphasises similarities with fears and fantasies associated with brainwashing. Obviously, there has been an ocean of ink spilled on histories of black slavery in America and of the long-reaching impact that has had on black Americans. The location of the prison camp and relationship of master and slave as a template for brainwashing has been less remarked upon. And the possible connections between American uses of racism to control various groups of people within its expanding territories, and the American invention of the word brainwashing, has rarely been suggested. It was a claim made by several Black activists during the Civil Rights era but has not resulted in a body of academic work dedicated to exploring these connections.

One of the ways in which race is a useful way to think about brainwashing is to help clarify the difference between hard and soft brainwashing.⁶ In the earliest accounts of brainwashing, Edward Hunter distinguished between brain-washing and brain-changing, with the latter being a much firmer variant of the enhanced education of which the first was comprised.⁷ The distinction I make here is that the feature of hard brainwashing is a demand that the outward display of the brainwashed subject is a perfect reflection of what we believe is taking place inside the subject. So, to use a historical example, the demonstrated belief in Stalin is one that really does see the Soviet leader as the saviour of the nation, rather than an outward display of loyalty which masks at least the possibility of internal resistance. When it comes to control of the masses there is actually room for the possibility that the display of loyalty and belief is only skin deep and that the thoughts which occur underneath are on a different, inaudible wavelength. When the harder form of brainwashing is exerted, this can be read as a fantasy of making what is seen on the surface a perfect correlative of that which goes on underneath. To believe that someone has been brainwashed is to believe

⁶ This is not to make any kind of empirical claim but to reflect the literature, which has consistently made distinctions between hard and soft brainwashing.

⁷ Edward Hunter, "Brain-Washing" Tactics Force Chinese into Ranks of the Communist Party', *Miami News*, 24 September 1950.

that there is an unbreakable connection between outside force and internal reaction. That is to say that with hard brainwashing, the capacity for resistance has been removed from the subject.

But how can the brainwasher be sure that this has been achieved? What guarantee is there that the object has correlated with the subject? This problem is stated succinctly in the opening paragraph of *The Mind Manipulators* (1978), a work that is particularly concerned with the technologies used by regimes to control the individual. Here, the authors refer to the skull as a ‘case of bony armour’ acting as an ‘impenetrable barrier to those who would impose their wills totally upon others. As long as a man’s thoughts remain his private possession, domination ends at the scalp.’⁸ We might question what it would mean for thoughts to count as ‘private possessions’, but the challenge remains instructive; this is a quest to control and dominate utterly, quashing and converting any energy towards resistance. The brainwashed subject is so horrific because the shell of the brain has been smashed; the distance which allows a person to resist the conditioned reflex has been erased. This means that what is witnessed on the surface, and the sentiments uttered by the brainwashed being, is an instant and parallel enunciation of an internal mechanical process. This is why the brainwashed being is somehow a mix of sinew and electrical wiring. By its very extreme nature, this is a direction that tends to be embraced and elucidated in better ways by the film and the novel than it does in scientific accounts. There is something intrinsic to the idea of brainwashing in this sense which privileges the idea of the captured body and is idealised in a one–one relationship, perhaps best typified by the relationship of master and slave or Frankenstein and his monster.

Schefflin and Opton provide a definition of brainwashing that fits well with the methodologies used to train slaves into the way of life demanded of them in America:

First, sensory and physical deprivation operate to loosen the captive’s grasp of reality. Second, social isolation and rejection are designed to create feelings of inferiority in the captive and dependency on his antagonists. Third, interrogation is intended to produce conflicts of guilt and self-hatred that can only be resolved by embracing his captor’s philosophy. And fourth, the

⁸ Alan W. Schefflin and Edward M. Opton, *The Mind Manipulators: A Non-Fiction Account* (New York: Paddington Press, 1978), 9.

punishment of “bad” attitudes and the reward of “good” attitudes is regulated in a closed environment.⁹

A brief history of “settled” America reveals practices of captivity, slavery, and the subjugation and dehumanisation of those categorised as non-white. There is a notable similarity between these disavowed facets of history and the mid-century emergence of brainwashing as a new and foreign technology.

The American Constitution and Captivity

Native Americans suffered near extinction because of Europeans “settling” the country. There were around five million people living in America prior to European contact. The contact itself proved fatal to many because of European-borne diseases, and factors related to European colonialism increased the fatalities. Among these were war, compulsory relocation, forced labour, and dietary changes. The enforcement of Western Christianity and related lifestyle practices also led to a gradual but deadly cultural genocide against the Native Americans.¹⁰ And yet, as Susan Carruthers stresses, it has been the spectre of their own captivity that has been central to how Americans have portrayed themselves since occupying the country. She points out that the first settlers saw themselves as God’s chosen people, as redeemed captives freed from bondage. She also highlights the prevalence of imagery showing the Indian predator taking women and children as prisoners.¹¹ There are further similarities here to the perceived threat of the black man to the white woman, and the rescue narrative that was constructed around it. Carruthers stresses the interpretation of incarceration as being a humiliatingly feminine degradation, likening it to a rape of mental autonomy. She describes the captivity narratives of Puritan New England as brimming with anxiety that settlers taken captive would be turned towards other religions and in the process lose their souls.¹² This is to distract from, or perhaps reflect, the fact that in reality Native Americans were held captive on reservations and that the Europeans brought with them a burgeoning slave trade. This meant that tens of thousands of

⁹ Schefflin and Opton, 92. Original quote from Paul Jorgensen ‘Brainwashing: A Legal Defence’, unpublished, undated manuscript pp. 5–6

¹⁰ Jim Wallis, *America’s Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), Chapter 3: The Original Sin and its Legacy.

¹¹ Carruthers, *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing*, 4.

¹² Carruthers, 17.

Africans were shipped to the new country and held captive, and that their offspring would be born into captivity.

Since declaring independence from Great Britain on 4 July 1776 several Northern states had banished slavery or had passed legislation that would allow for gradual emancipation. When the 55 delegates from 12 states met between May and September 1787, to frame the constitution that would bring them together in a federal republic, most of the Southern states were determined to protect slavery from federal interference. They went about this by securing a compromise from non-slave states that for the purposes of calculating a state's population, a slave would count as three-fifths of a person. Such a calculation made no statement about the human value of the slaves but was an account merely of property and amplified the democratic voice of slaveowners.

The ratification of the Constitution was followed in 1790 by legislation which reserved naturalisation for 'free white persons'. This law went through various amendments but remained in force to prevent naturalisation on the basis of race, under various guises, until 1952.¹³ The Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves came into effect in America in 1808 but did nothing to halt the domestic practice. Rather, it proved a boon for the business, increasing the demand and value of the captives from within the US. The first federal census of 1790 recorded fewer than 700,000 slaves; by 1860, well over three million were recorded. During the middle of the nineteenth century the concept of white superiority began to be enshrined into law. In 1848, South Carolina's John C. Calhoun proclaimed that the United States had to be a white nation and that any form of incorporation that might threaten that status had to be resisted. Such views received legal backing in 1857 with the case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* finding that black people were 'altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.'¹⁴

¹³ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 4.

¹⁴ Jill Lepore, *This America: The Case for the Nation* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2020), 58–61.

The Slave Camp

Let us for a moment consider the process by which African people were transported to America to be made into slaves. American historian Charles W. Ephraim described how:

Africans were effectively deprogrammed as persons; they were depersonalised, robbed of their identity, with the intention of making them completely subservient to the white captors. ... [This] necessitated a full-scale programme of dehumanisation of the Africans, the wiping away of all traces of their past, an obliteration of their sense of ever having been somebody.¹⁵

It is important to note the affinities of language between such visions of slavery and accounts of the nature of brainwashing in the postwar period. Indeed, the account above does seem as apt a description of the nature of brainwashing (as it was understood in the 1950s) as it does of slavery. It is also relevant to bear in mind, though, that it was written in 2003. It is, therefore, an effort by a modern writer to imagine what it must have felt like to be an African captured as part of the slave trade. We might argue that the references to deprogramming, dehumanisation, and the wiping of identity that have now been deployed in such narratives about slavery are evidence, in fact, of how a language originally drawn from Cold War brainwashing narratives has spread and been applied retrospectively. They are terms which would not have been widely assumed and understood in the epoch of slavery being written about.¹⁶ There is, however, some evidence of such use. In 1845, William Lloyd Garrison described slavery as degrading black people such that ‘in the scale of humanity ... Nothing has been left undone to cripple their intellects, darken their minds, debase their moral nature, obliterate all traces of their relationship to mankind.’¹⁷ Such accounts draw useful comparisons between what the very worst exponents of brainwashing were said to be aiming for and what American plantation owners may actually have achieved: a grotesque and total assault upon identity through imprisonment, terror, the reduction of the adult to infantile dependency, and a state where the subject is dead to the world,

¹⁵ Charles W. Ephraim, *The Pathology of Eurocentrism: The Burden and Responsibilities of Being Black* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World, 2003), 2–3.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Charlie Williams for this sharp insight.

¹⁷ Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. (Boston, MA: Anti-Slavery Office, 1849), vii, <https://www.loc.gov/item/82225385/>.

and can see salvation only in the figure of the person who has put them into that place. The dependency on the slaveowner became so pronounced – or was meant to have been so – that when they were finally freed, one of the arguments against freedom was that they would not be able to take care of themselves and would therefore spread moral and physical disease.¹⁸

American historian Stanley Elkins described a similar process of converting the captured Africans into slaves. This took the form of a series of shocks, the first being capture. Elkins wrote that ‘It is an effort to remember that while enslavement occurred in Africa every day, to the individual it occurred just once.’¹⁹ The second shock was the long march to the sea, which would have taken weeks in the hot sun. Then followed sale, the slave ship to the West Indies, followed by reawakening in America as a slave. Elkins wrote:

Much of his past had been annihilated; nearly every prior connection had been severed ... The old values, the sanctions, the standards, already unreal, could no longer furnish him guides for conduct, for adjusting to the expectations of a new life. Where then was he to look for new standards, new cues – who would furnish them now? He could look to none but his master, the one man to whom the system had committed his entire being: the man upon whose will depended his food, his shelter, his sexual connections, whatever moral instruction he might be offered, whatever “success” was possible within the system, his very security – in short, everything.²⁰

Hannah Arendt, writing in 1951, also spoke of the concentration camp in terms that bring to mind the plantation. She compared the camp to a laboratory in which science reduced people to ‘mere bundles of reactions.’ The products of this she referred to as ‘ghastly marionettes with human faces, which all behave like the dog in Pavlov’s experiments, which all react with perfect reliability even when going to their own death, and which do nothing but react.’²¹ More recently, the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe has described the slave plantation as a ‘paranoid institution’ creating a ‘perpetual regime of fear.’ He wrote of how: ‘It combined aspects of a camp, a pen,

¹⁸ John M. Hoberman, *Black and Blue: The Origins and Consequences of Medical Racism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 20.

¹⁹ Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*, 3d ed., rev (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 99. [1959]

²⁰ Elkins, 101–2.

²¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New ed. with Added Prefaces (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 455.

and a paramilitary society. The slave master could deploy one form of coercion after another, create chains of dependence between him and his slaves, and alternate between terror and generosity, but his existence was always haunted by the spectre of extermination.²² How similar do these accounts sound to the idealised, fantasy brainwashing process – to take someone out of their familiar zone of operation, confuse and demean them until they become utterly dependent and are forced to leave behind their past?

Historian Eric Foner states that ‘Slavery helped to shape the identity, the sense of self, of all Americans. Constituting the most impenetrable boundary of citizenship, slavery rendered blacks all but invisible to those imagining the American community.’²³ Cultural historians Stam and Shohat liken the struggle that has occupied America from its inception to a battle between two competing political models: one democratic – embodied in the town hall – and the other tyrannical – embodied in the Big House of slavery. Or as a battle over the political hermeneutics of the founding documents: the insistence of the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal versus the Constitution’s calculation of slaves as property.²⁴ The way this played out into the twentieth century was again memorably captured by Ralph Ellison as a contradiction between the ‘sacred democratic belief that all men are born equal and his treatment of every tenth man as though he were not.’²⁵ Ellison also spoke of how the black American had been made into a “natural resource” who, ‘so that the white man could become more human, was elected to undergo a process of institutionalised dehumanisation.’²⁶ Part of this dehumanisation was to deny that black people were able to reason, and if they were unable to reason they could not properly exercise freedom, thus making slavery a natural condition for them.²⁷ And this was one of the reasons that the slave

²² Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, ed. Laurent Dubois (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 19.

²³ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (London: Picador, 1999), 38.

²⁴ Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, *Race in Translation: Culture Wars around the Postcolonial Atlantic* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 17.

²⁵ Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 28.

²⁶ Ellison, 29.

²⁷ Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, 40–41.

was denied any access to knowledge. The institution did nothing to grant knowledge and did its utmost to destroy any desire for it.²⁸

This link between brainwashing and the legacy of slavery was taken up by Malcolm X, who claimed that a form of brainwashing had been used to deny black people any stake in America. He connected this to the slaveholding enterprise. He described how white slaveowners had to

invent a system that would strip us of everything about us that we could use to prove we were somebody. And once he had stripped us of all human characteristics, stripped us of our language, stripped us of our history, stripped us of all cultural knowledge, and brought us down to the level of an animal – he then began to treat us like an animal, selling us from one plantation to another, selling us from one owner to another, breeding us like you breed cattle ... We must launch a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire generation.²⁹

X also wrote a letter to the *Pittsburgh Courier* in October 1962 in which he responded to an earlier letter from a Sudanese Muslim, Yahya Hayari. X expressed doubt around Hayari's Muslim credentials as he had, according to X, attacked Muhammad. If he was really a Muslim, wrote X, 'then he has been in Christian America too long, and already sounds like a Westernized, brainwashed, American Negro.'³⁰ X spoke of the black American awaking to his condition in much the same way as he talked of the need for unbrainwashing. He said 'as soon as you wake up and find out the positive answer to all these things, you cease being a Negro. You become somebody.'³¹ X was speaking around the same time that a *New York Times* feature on the use of 'Negro idiom[s]' was titled 'If You're Woke You Dig It'.³²

In the letters he wrote from Soledad prison, the Black activist George Jackson described himself as being born a slave in a captive society, in which a predictable

²⁸ Stam and Shohat, *Race in Translation*, 13.

²⁹ BlackPast, '(1964) Malcolm X's Speech at the Founding Rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity • BlackPast', 16 October 2007, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/speeches-african-american-history/1964-malcolm-x-s-speech-founding-rally-organization-afro-american-unity/>.

³⁰ Malcolm X, 'What Courier Readers Think: Muslim vs. Moslem!', *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 October 1962, 13.

³¹ BlackPast, '(1964) Malcolm X's Speech at the Founding Rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity • BlackPast'.

³² William Melvin Kelley, 'If You're Woke You Dig It', *New York Times Magazine*, 20 May 1962, 332.

series of ‘traumatic misfortunes’ would lead him to prison.³³ Making further comparisons with slavery and captivity, he also referred to the prison as a concentration camp and spoke repeatedly of the brainwashing which caused black people to have difficulties with relationships, particularly within the family. He referred to this as ‘European-Anglo-American brainwashing.’ In a letter to his mother on 4 May 1968, he said that black Americans had been ‘subjected to the most thorough brainwashing of any people in history. Isolated as we were, or are, from our land, our roots and our institutions, no group of men have been so thoroughly terrorized, dehumanized, and divested of those things that from birth make men strong.’³⁴

I recount these numerous accounts of the shared features of the slave camp and brainwashing because they are often neglected in histories of brainwashing. Historically, the two practices – one very real, and one largely imagined – come from different epochs. And the inextricability of brainwashing from Cold War geopolitics, at least in its earliest manifestations, mean it is usually focused on the white communist rather than the black American. Even within such circumscribed accounts, it was still the case that there was a disproportionate number of black subjects in brainwashing experiments and that black activists were often described as the dupes of communist controllers. There is an imaginative leap required to try to think about the experience of the slave, and we may infuse our imaginings with modern concepts, but the accounts of Black civil rights activists in the 1960s clearly show that some of them still regarded America as a huge plantation, the running of which required the brainwashing of the captive and their captors.

Milieu Control

The process of enslavement and the dehumanisation which was enforced in the concentration camp bears a striking resemblance to some of the features of *ideological totalitarianism* as elaborated by the social scientist Robert J. Lifton in his 1961 monograph *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*.³⁵ Lifton’s book was one of the first sustained attempts to define brainwashing. Lifton would have rejected the term itself

³³ George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books: Distributed by Independent Publishers Group, 1994), 4.

³⁴ Jackson, 173.

³⁵ Robert J. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of ‘Brainwashing’ in China* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

as he considered it to be already imbued with too much sensationalism and he preferred the term ideological totalitarianism. Lifton distinguished eight features which he considered to be consistent aspects of any attempt at thought control. I will show briefly how each of these features operate in the administration of racist regimes. But the most important and, according to Lifton, ‘the psychological current upon which all else depends, is the control of human communication.’³⁶ It is this which Lifton refers to as *milieu control*. The idea here is to create a disruption of balance between the self and the outside world. A person is unable to test the realities of the environment due to being deprived of external information and the opportunity for inner reflection.

In order to understand how this works as a tool of racism, it is vital that we see it as operating both on the perpetrator of racism and on its recipient. In his book *Stamped from the Beginning*, Ibram X. Kendi rejects the causal relationship exemplified by some accounts of racism, that an initial ignorance leads to a belief in racist ideas and then to social discrimination. Rather, argues Kendi, there is a deliberate creation of discriminatory policies by the powerful which then lead to racist ideas which then produce ignorance and fuel hatred:

The beneficiaries of slavery, segregation, and mass incarceration have produced racist ideas of Black people being best suited for or deserving of the confines of slavery, segregation, or the jail cell. Consumers of these racist ideas have been led to believe there is something wrong with Black people, and not the policies that have enslaved, oppressed, and confined so many Black people.³⁷

Racism is institutionally organised to protect and sustain power, and to generate difference and division between people, whose dissatisfactions might otherwise be directed against those who benefit most from the prevailing societal structure. So, while it was desirable to control and limit the realm of communication for black Americans in order to “keep them in their place”, it was equally if not more important to control the communication of ordinary white Americans so that the majority of them would continue to regard black Americans as inferior and unworthy of full and equal citizenship. During the first half of the twentieth century, one of the most important

³⁶ Lifton, 420.

³⁷ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 2017), 9–10.

arenas for centralising and valorising whiteness, at the same time as marginalising and denigrating blackness, was Hollywood cinema.

Lifton does not refer directly to either cinema or race in his chapter on ideological totalism, but he chooses as an epigraph to it a quotation from the Jesuit priest and philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who said: 'If to see more is really to become more, if deeper vision is really fuller being, then we should look closely at man in order to increase our capacity to live.' In the book from which the quotation is taken, Teilhard then goes on to say that 'the history of the living world can be summarised as the elaboration of ever more perfect eyes' and thus, in order for our fulfilment, 'we must focus our eyes correctly.'³⁸ The implication of this is that in order to fully understand, and to live the fullest and most humane life, we need to look closely, deeply and without extraneous disturbance. The obverse of this would mean that if we wish to diminish humanity and decrease the capacity to live, we should ensure that people see the world in a way that blurs, distorts, and blinkers true vision. It also calls to mind Foucault and his insistence that to master visibility is to control the field of discipline. Ensuring that a subject is constantly seen is to lock them in their subjection.

What Lifton captures with this notion of *milieu control* is an inability to frame the world in any meaningful way outside of the parameters erected by the controlling agencies. The agencies meet any challenges with threats and punishments, as highlighted by the author and social activist bell hooks³⁹ with her injunctions on looking. Hooks recognises the power of looking, but would also grant the temptation to not look or to pretend to have seen something different. Lifton says that succumbing to the prevailing ideology frees a person from an 'incessant struggle with the elusive subtleties of truth';⁴⁰ it also serves to buttress the structures that contain it. Richard Wright gives memorable voice to this in his account of the workplace humiliations he received in order to accept his place within the structure. Falsely accused by a colleague of referring to their boss as *Pease* rather than *Mr. Pease*, the young Wright

³⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins, 1955), 32.

³⁹ hooks was born Gloria Jean Watkins but has chosen to be called "bell hooks" in recognition of her maternal great-grandmother Bell Blair Hooks. She spells the name in lower case.

⁴⁰ Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, 421.

knows that if he denies it, he will be beaten for suggesting his white colleague is lying, and if he admits to it, the result will be the same. He is forced to leave his job.⁴¹

Thomas Borstelmann shows similar forces at play in the case of Willie McGee, a black American accused of raping a white woman on a questionable rape charge. The judge in the case was asked by a journalist whether evidence of the woman coercing McGee into a sexual relationship had been suppressed. The judge replied:

If you believe, or are implying, that any white woman in the South, who was not completely down and out, degenerate, degraded and corrupted, could have anything to do with a Negro man, you not only do not know what you are talking about, but you are insulting us, the whole South. You do not know the South, and do not realize that we could not entertain such a proposition; that we could not even consider it in court.⁴²

This is a perfect example of the milieu control elaborated by Lifton: *we could not entertain such a proposition*. This possibility – of a white woman desiring a black man - is barred from open discourse and cannot be considered as a possible scenario. It is outside the frame, beyond the realm of permissible thought.

Cases such as the above were collected together in a powerful document compiled by the Civil Rights Congress and handed to the United Nations in 1951. The paper was titled *We Charge Genocide*, on the basis that the daily abuses and aggressions faced by black Americans were done with the intent to destroy them as a group and therefore amounted to a form of genocide. The authors declared that it was so common to treat black people as less than human that it had become:

carved into their daily thinking, woven in to their total living experience. They are lynched in the thousands of glances from white supremacists all over the land every day, in discourtesies; insults, snobbery; in all the great events of the total national experience and as well in all the minutest experience. The great

⁴¹ Richard Wright, 'The Ethics of Living Jim Crow', in *Uncle Tom's Children* (New York: Penguin Books, 1947). Ironically, after Richard Wright appeared on a radio programme in May 1944, the station received letters of complaint that the presenter had referred to the novelist as Mr. Wright. Barbara Savage, 'Radio and the Political Discourse of Racial Equality', in *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, ed. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York: Routledge, 2002), 240.

⁴² Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5.

daily clash of two peoples living together in antagonism, with walls of bigotry between, is a mass lynch act committed constantly against the fifteen million.⁴³

The way in which such treatment is normalised fits well into the second feature highlighted by Lifton, which he terms ‘mystical manipulation’. For Lifton’s formulation to work here depends, to some extent, on regarding the racist as the person who has been brainwashed. They operate within a milieu initiated from above which provokes ‘specific patterns of behaviour and emotion in such a way that these will appear to have arisen spontaneously from within the environment.’⁴⁴ Because it is vital that for racism to work, the person who is going to be subject to its discrimination and violence must be seen as something other than how they really appear, it is the racist who first needs to be manipulated. The manipulations which take place are many and mundane, and serve to normalise a planned response as if it is a natural attribute of belonging to a race. The most egregious example of this is through driving black people into unlawful actions through poverty and lack of opportunities and then denying opportunities because as black people they are declared to be wasted on them. The corollary of this debasement of the black person is the exaltation of the white person, who comes to believe that they are superior, thus allowing ideas of White Supremacy and Manifest Destiny to take hold.

Lifton’s third feature, and one with direct application to racism, is the demand for purity. He writes that ‘All “taints” and “poisons” which contribute to the existing state of impurity must be searched out and eliminated.’⁴⁵ So, just as “one drop” of the wrong racial blood can lead to a person being outed as impure, so can one incorrect ideological thought. Moreover, just as pure whiteness is unachievable, leading to extraordinary performances of its alleged attributes, so an excess of ideological rigour is demanded by the totalitarian regime. The philosopher Etienne Balibar stresses the mythic and unattainable nature of these types of demand, describing them as an ‘obsessional quest for a core authenticity that cannot be found.’⁴⁶ Again, it should be stressed here that

⁴³ William Lorenzo Patterson, ed., *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government against the Negro People* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 79.

⁴⁴ Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, 422.

⁴⁵ Lifton, 423.

⁴⁶ Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London; New York: Verso, 1991), 60.

the brainwashing is taking place, in the first instance against the white majority, those who are being deliberately misled into seeing other citizens in a way which creates difference and fission where this does not naturally exist. Racism serves power so that inequalities and injustice can be directed away from where they actually exist and experienced as a division between those who should be united as the recipients of exploitative practices.

The fourth feature outlined by Lifton is a cult of confession. Although the demand for the black person to confess to crimes and moral failings has been a consistent feature of American history, it does not possess the attributes of a cult. This is therefore the least applicable of Lifton's tenets to American racism. But what he terms 'sacred science' (his fifth feature) certainly resonates with the insistence on a racial hierarchy and the efforts to engineer science towards a confirmation of this. If the basic dogma of American ideology has been based around white supremacy, then it is true that its whole milieu 'maintains an aura of sacredness around [it], holding it out as an ultimate moral vision for the ordering of human existence.'⁴⁷

The final three components have direct application to the establishment of racism in America. 'Loading the language' is the process whereby the inferiority of the outsider is contained in the language and doctrines of the dominant group. Those who do not talk or view the world "like us" are refused entry into it. But in being kept out they are constricted in how they can respond; they are linguistically deprived, and malnourished in imaginative expression.⁴⁸ The author Alice Childress captures this well in her novel *Like One of the Family* when she worries about how she will be received when she travels abroad:

gonna come walkin' up to me expectin' me to laugh and grin, sing 'em a song, do a little jig for 'em, act simple and foolish, be lovable and childish, be bowin' and scrapin' and keep 'em laughin' at every word I say ... I would say "Don't come walkin' up to me and actin' like I'm some puppy-dog or pet bird or somethin'! Are you out of your mind?" And then they would back up from me and say to their friends, "They're not like we thought they was at all. Here we was thinkin' that they laugh and play all the time and the truth is, they are *mean*!"⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, 427.

⁴⁸ Lifton, 430.

⁴⁹ Alice Childress, *Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic's Life* (Brooklyn, NY: Independence Publishers, 1956), Chapter 36: 'About those Colored Movies'.

Lifton links this idea to his next feature, the primacy of ‘doctrine over person’. This demands that the realities of individual experience are secondary to the field of myth and doctrine. James Baldwin highlights how, on some level, the white person cannot fail to recognise the humanity of the black person when they look them in the eye. The demand that they must be relegated to a zone of inferiority means that ‘the human is subjugated to the ahuman.’⁵⁰ Finally, and most dramatically, Lifton speaks of the ‘dispensing of existence’. Because of the ultimate power and control that the white majority wields, it can decide whether the “inferior race” has any right to life at all.

So much of what Lifton collects under these various headings can be summarised as denying the dignity of the subjugated person and elevating the role of the master or system so that they have total control over the life of the other. Nick Bromell shows how these features were central to slaveholding practices in America. He also argues that the relationship between male master and female slave best reveals the disavowal of humanity that was at play during this time. There are numerous stories of masters seeking to change the relationship from one of master/slave to one of master/concubine. Although demanded to be available as a sexual vessel whenever required, the real power resided in forcing a *person* to succumb, rather than a *body* or an *animal*.⁵¹ The desire to achieve this gives the lie to the idea that the body was ever seen as merely that.

The Spectacle of Race

The irrationality – and often total illogicality – of racist beliefs means that the perpetrators of racism are forced into almost constant denial, and particularly so when in the company of black people. This is because the visual register – meant to be the most reliable access to truth – is the most likely to offer contradictory evidence. Firstly, as Baldwin remarks, there is always an initial and deliberate misrecognition because the white person does register, and immediately denies, that what they see before them is another human being. The white American succumbs to the constructed picture of the Negro which has been used to override this natural connection: ‘to be a Negro

⁵⁰ Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, 431.

⁵¹ Bromell, *The Time Is Always Now*, 41.

meant, precisely, that one was never looked at but was simply at the mercy of the reflexes the colour of one's skin caused in other people.⁵²

Secondly, this mismatch between sight and ideology was compounded by the widespread presence of mulattos who did not even allow for Baldwin's 'reflexes of the colour of one's skin' to take effect. As stated earlier, this was one of the reasons why segregation was demanded: so that problematic bodies could be kept out of sight of white eyes, and if they were seen, their "true essence" could be registered through a process of visual association. These misperceptions, whose outcome is a denial of truth, are why Baldwin suggests that white people are 'the slightly mad victims of their own brainwashing.'⁵³

The cultural historian Samira Kawash has quite brilliantly captured the difficulties born out of a demand for race to be seen, and, at the same time, the unreliability of our racialised observations. She writes:

The modern conception of racial identity maintains an uneasy relation to the visual; the visible marks of the racialised body are only signs of a deeper, interior difference, and yet those visible marks are the only differences that can be observed. The body is the sign of a difference that exceeds the body. The modern concept of race is therefore predicated on an epistemology of visibility, but the visible becomes an insufficient guarantee of knowledge. As a result, the possibility of a gap opens up between what the body says and what the body means.⁵⁴

It is this gap *between what the body says and what the body means* that I claim as instructive in understanding the seductive appeal of brainwashing to any person or regime aspiring to total mastery: the knowledge and confidence that what is seen and heard is a perfect outward transmission of an inner subjugation.⁵⁵

⁵² Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 132.

⁵³ James Baldwin, *The Fire next Time* (London: Penguin Books, 1964), 86.

⁵⁴ Samira Kawash, *Dislocating the Colour Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Narrative* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 130.

⁵⁵ If we were looking for a cinematic metaphor, I can think of none better than Harry Caul's (Gene Hackman) obsessive efforts to capture the perfect recording of a conversation in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1973). This perfect analogue is as impossible and as to demand that what we witness is what is real.

James Baldwin and Racial Integration

In a letter to his nephew on the centenary anniversary of emancipation, James Baldwin argued that if racial integration was to have any chance of working in America, it was essential that black Americans ‘with love, shall force our [white] brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it.’ Baldwin told his nephew that white Americans are ‘trapped in a history which they do not understand ... They have had to believe for many years ... that black men are inferior to white men.’ What makes those whites who question this fail to act on it is the threat of ‘the loss of their identity’ because ‘the black man has functioned in the white man’s world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations.’⁵⁶ It is helpful to think about Baldwin’s statement on integration and the white flight from reality in the context of Kleinian psychoanalysis. Klein’s theories were primarily concerned with child development, and she practised most influentially in Great Britain between the wars. However, her emphasis on *projection* and *bad objects* has clear parallels with some of Baldwin’s remarks.

Baldwin made no claims for the helpfulness of the psychological sciences in the battle for civil rights, and sometimes commented on their unsuiteness for understanding non-white problems.⁵⁷ And there were psychiatrists who admitted to how ill-equipped they felt to deal with the problems which black patients brought to them. The psychiatrist Rutherford B. Stevens bemoaned the lack of a ‘magic formula for gaining rapport with the Negro patient.’ And two of his colleagues, Herbert S. Ripley and Stewart Wolf, in a paper speaking of the difficulty of evaluating the ‘Negroid personality’, still resorted to racial stereotypes of susceptibility to hallucinations and a strong sex drive. Even Gunnar Myrdal referred to a mask behind which the ‘true self’ of the Negro was hidden.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, without claiming that Klein had any real understanding of racial prejudice, or that it played a significant part in her thinking, aspects of her theories are helpful in working through the mechanics of racism. For example, Klein emphasised how the infant projects unwanted parts of

⁵⁶ Baldwin, *The Fire next Time*, 16–17.

⁵⁷ As a black homosexual, he may have felt doubly excluded from its dominant discourse.

⁵⁸ Hoberman, *Black and Blue: The Origins and Consequences of Medical Racism*, 161–63.

the self into other objects. She also spoke of the atrophying effect that could have on the person projecting.

Melanie Klein famously elaborated the idea of developmental positions which the infant passes through and between, back and forth, in bridging an accommodation between unconscious fantasies and an acceptance of reality. These positions are the paranoid-schizoid position, which Klein posited as operating from birth, and the depressive position, which comes later. The infant at first protects the fragile ego from annihilation through a bifurcation of its world into “all-good” and “all-bad” objects. Eventually it will realise that these objects are in fact parts of a more complex whole and sometimes even the same object experienced in a different way. This is what Klein refers to as the depressive position. Nevertheless, the mind will always struggle to maintain stability and its structures will arise out of ‘a continually shifting, kaleidoscopic stream of primitive, phantasmagoric images, fantasies, and terrors.’⁵⁹ The political theorist David W. McIvor makes a compelling case for using the psychoanalytic framework developed by Klein as a theoretical structure for some of Baldwin’s observations on the lived experience of racism in America. He thinks that Klein, more so than Freud, ‘sociologises the individual.’ The subject is forever making ‘creative identifications in perpetual interaction with its environment.’⁶⁰ The infant also casts out those parts of the self that produce anxiety on to an external object. But once this has been done, there is always a danger that they will ‘reinvade the internal world of the ego as persecutory figures.’⁶¹ McIvor thinks that Baldwin articulated something akin to this in the ‘pure terror’ which white people experienced in accepting that their own whiteness might be as illusory as the “all-good” breast. To believe in whiteness is to insist on a paranoid-schizoid state of mind, ‘rooted in a terror that cannot be expressed because to do so would cause the disintegration of the constructed boundaries that reinforce identity – and hence would threaten the dissolution of the self.’⁶² The damage which white people know that they have inflicted upon blacks, if

⁵⁹ Brian Rasmussen and Daniel Salhani, ‘A Contemporary Kleinian Contribution to Understanding Racism’, *Social Service Review* 84, no. 3 (2010): 496, <https://doi.org/10.1086/656401>.

⁶⁰ David W. McIvor, ‘The Struggle of Integration: James Baldwin and Melanie Klein in the Context of Black Lives Matter’, *James Baldwin Review* 2, no. 1 (2016): 80, <https://www.manchesteropenhive.com/view/journals/jbr/2/1/article-p75.xml>.

⁶¹ McIvor, 82.

⁶² McIvor, 84.

acknowledged, produces feelings of guilt and also a fear that they may become the targets of revenge.

Baldwin argues that an understanding of American history and the fundamental position of race in that history, are what will free the white American from the tragic innocence of their idealised, essentially infantile position. Baldwin understands that history; he realises that it is one in which white and black are intimately bound. He insists that the way that white people see themselves is reflected in how they deliberately misrecognise black people. Therefore, to see themselves as they are, they will also need to see black people as they are. This approaches the depressive position as theorised by Klein, and for Baldwin, the only meaningful form of integration: *forc[ing] our brothers to see themselves as they are*. One of the features of Kleinian psychoanalysis is that the move between positions is never definitive. Once the depressive position has been adopted there will be slippages back into the paranoid-schizoid position. This will heighten feelings of guilt and reparation, but also of denial and disavowal. Specifically, for the purposes of this study, in the postwar period, there was a notable gap between pride in having defeated Nazism and racist practices at home. It is worth noting here too that this gap was principally one experienced at a national level rather than at an individual level. For many who fought in the war, beating “the Jap” or “the Hun” will have bolstered feelings of racial superiority rather than cast them into doubt.

Viewing with Fanon

The mismatch between how the American government wanted to be seen by the rest of the world and how individuals and practices operated, was, I contend, a significant factor in the release of the clutch of films with a racial theme in 1949. The first of these was the Stanley Kramer produced *Home of the Brave* (1949). Frantz Fanon described his experience of watching this movie and his account allows us to see how the brief history I have offered permeates the film and a black viewer’s reaction to it. Fanon made extensive reference to cinema and other forms of popular culture throughout his first major work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), stressing their powerful psychological impact on the formation of black identities. He also wrote in a strong visual, episodic manner, with vignettes easy to imagine on the cinema screen. He thus described sitting

in a French cinema among a white audience, waiting to watch *Home of the Brave*. Fanon shared his mounting anxiety as he waited for the film to begin:

I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. In the interval, just before the film starts, I wait for me. The people in the theatre are watching me, examining me, waiting for me. A Negro groom is going to appear. My heart makes my head swim.⁶³

Here, Fanon first positions himself as an ordinary film viewer, looking for ways to identify with the characters projected on to the screen. But there is an increased urgency in this case. He repeats ‘I wait for me’ and imagines that the whole cinema is waiting for him. This gestures towards a gap between Fanon as a person and the image about to be shown on the screen. And, particularly bearing in mind that the cinema will be in darkness, it suggests that Fanon himself is invisible to the rest of the audience. The image about to be offered to the white audience for their examination will define Fanon. Anticipating what might appear on the screen, he says: ‘A Negro groom is going to appear.’ At this point, Fanon does not know that the film will not even feature a female character (even if the absence – and poetry – of one woman is central to the story). Could Fanon be referencing *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)? Specifically, the image of Gus, the freed black slave, who thought that freedom entitled him to ask a white woman to marry him? The impact of this film was at least partly responsible for the paucity of positive images of black people during the interwar years. Such was the heightened response to the film – it could be suggested as being traumatic – there was a reluctance to revisit its subject and scenes. And now, with the release of a film purporting to show a strong black character, Fanon waits with a mix of anticipation and trepidation. He waits also, perhaps, like a bride awaiting her groom. He knows that the image in the film will represent him, so that he will live in its shadow. His reference to how his heart makes his head swim plays on this “romantic” theme and shows rationality being drowned by emotions.

Fanon then offered a one-line summary of the film he viewed: ‘The crippled veteran of the Pacific war says to my brother, “Resign yourself to your colour the way I got used to my stump; we’re both victims.”’⁶⁴ The message of the film for Fanon was that he should ‘adopt the humility of the cripple.’ But that, he asserted, was an amputation

⁶³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 107.

⁶⁴ Fanon, 107.

he refused to accept. In fact, he now felt in himself ‘a soul as immense as the world ... my chest has the power to expand without limit.’⁶⁵

I close this chapter with Fanon because he provides an evocative account of the power of cinema to create images that will fix an identity ‘in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye.’⁶⁶ Fanon shows how much is at stake, with his conviction that the whole of the theatre is waiting to see his image on the screen. He also indicates how that image can be opposed, analysed or resisted. That he is better able to resist it than the white audience supports James Baldwin’s assertion that it is they who are ‘the slightly mad victims of brainwashing.’⁶⁷ But this is not to say that it is easy to resist the power of such an image. Both Baldwin and Fanon mention growing up and cheering on Tarzan in fights against the jungle savages before the cruel realisation that Tarzan was not meant to represent the black viewer; that Baldwin’s and Fanon’s identifications, by contrast, were supposed to be with the primitive African tribes. Fanon regarded the Tarzan stories as ‘a release for collective aggression.’⁶⁸ Baldwin described how in school ‘I learned that I was the illegitimate son of Tarzan, and that I have contributed nothing to mankind’s well-being. I was a savage ... That gives you a complex.’⁶⁹ The Tarzan series of films was one of the few examples where black bodies were in evidence in interwar Hollywood cinema. The stress on bodies is deliberate here, as they functioned more as scenery, aligned with the trees, the river, and the wild animals. Where black actors took the role of characters, they were invariably cast as servants, entertainers, or miscreants. And here again, certainly in the first instance, and often in the second, they still functioned, at least partly, as scenery. They were positioned to situate, offset, spotlight, and highlight the central white stars. More often, they were not seen at all.

In Chapter 4, I provide a more detailed account of the cinematic history that saw the sidelining and demonising of black Americans. Before that, I explore the context

⁶⁵ Fanon, 107.

⁶⁶ Fanon, 82.

⁶⁷ Baldwin, *The Fire next Time*, 62.

⁶⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112–13.

⁶⁹ Nabile Farès and Peter Thompson, ‘James Baldwin: A 1970 Interview’, *Transition*, no. 105 (2011): 68, <https://doi.org/10.2979/transition.105.62>.

of the introduction of *brainwashing* into the American lexicon and its interactions and crossovers with race and cinema.

Chapter 3 – Captive Minds: American Prisoners in Korea

We will conquer the world not with atomic bombs, but with our ideas, our brains, and our doctrines.

Soviet Foreign Minister, Andri Vishinsky (1949)¹

At the midpoint of the twentieth century, the word “brainwashing” was introduced into the English language. It emerged almost simultaneously in publications on both sides of the Atlantic, but it was because of its power to explain the “un-American” behaviour of American prisoners in Korea that it gained serious cultural and political traction. This chapter examines two manifestations of brainwashing. The first is the emergence into the English lexicon of the word itself in 1950. The second is when the word was applied to explain the behaviour of American prisoners during the Korean War, mainly in 1953, which led to it gaining a much wider reach. By placing the introduction of the word in its historical context, I will show that brainwashing and American racism were drawing from a similar network of concepts. Brainwashing never came with a precise scientific explanation, and from its inception this ambiguity lent the term both capacious and often imaginative applications. This also made it a concept that was attractive to filmmakers (and writers), and so from the outset the word was the pivot of a feedback loop between fiction, science, and ideology. The chapter provides evidence that race was a more important factor in the Korean brainwashing scare than has usually been acknowledged, and that these three powerful forces of race, brainwashing, and captivity fed into and out of cinema in transformative ways in the early 1950s.

The word “brainwashing” took on different connotations when it was applied in 1953 than when it was first introduced in 1950. This was because in the first instance it was reported as a sensational account of how foreign communist authorities were ensuring compliance and conformity from their own citizens. At this point, the practice was not related as constituting a threat to America itself. In fact, the way in which the Chinese – who were seen as the most enthusiastic brainwashers – succumbed to this new technique, only served to confirm their peculiar susceptibility, their natural inclination to act as a mass. This was a racial stereotype which was regularly used to characterise

¹ Raymond B. Lech, *Broken Soldiers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 3.

Asian people and had been deployed as a propaganda tool against the Japanese in World War II. In contrast, one of the defining features of Americanism was meant to be individuality and an accompanying scepticism towards authority. In 1953 it was American prisoners who were capitulating with disturbing ease to their foreign captors, and this was difficult to accept for those hearing such stories back home. I draw out the racialised aspects of this unease and the techniques used by the Chinese as a means of exploiting them. I conclude with a consideration of how these factors were condensed in the Samuel Fuller film *The Steel Helmet* (1951), conceived and filmed in the first year of the Korean War.

The Word “Brainwashing”

The first use of the word “brainwashing” is generally accredited to Edward Hunter, writing in the *Miami News* in September 1950. The article began: “Brain-washing” is the principal activity on the Chinese mainland nowadays. Unrevealed thousands of men and women are having their brains “washed”.² It is interesting that, in this introduction of a new word, Hunter felt no need to explain what he meant by it, or to share that it was a translation of the Chinese colloquialism *hsi nao* (wash brain). This could be taken as evidence that the word was already in circulation; for example, it had appeared in an article written by the French journalist Robert Guillain for *The Guardian* in January 1950.³ And Cold War historian Charlie Williams has also discovered a use of the word by the American author and psychological warfare expert Paul Linebarger shortly before Hunter’s article.⁴ This is especially interesting given Linebarger’s extensive travels in China and that he published a book on psychological warfare in 1948.⁵ As far back as 1945, Linebarger was privately fantasising in his notebook for future work about the possibility of ‘The Chemical Third Degree’. He wrote:

Consider the overwhelming change which would occur in law, morals, and war if quasi-medical procedures were devised which would unpeel the consciousness like an onion and bare the substance of recollection to

² Hunter, “Brain-Washing” Tactics Force Chinese into Ranks of the Communist Party’, 2.

³ Robert Guillain, ‘China Under the Red Flag: III – The “New Democracy”’, *The Guardian*, 3 January 1950, 6. Guillain characterised the process as being like ‘laying one’s heart on the table.’ It allowed for a cleansing of the soul and the discovery of a new purpose.

⁴ Marcia Holmes, ‘Edward Hunter and the Origins of “brainwashing” | Hidden Persuaders’, 26 May 2017, <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hiddenpersuaders/blog/hunter-origins-of-brainwashing/>.

⁵ Paul Linebarger, *Psychological Warfare* (Washington, DC: Infantry Journal Press, 1948).

interrogators. Amytal intravenously administered is some help but what is needed is not so much a mere hypnotic, as an intoxicating-shocking drug which would – without leaving permanent trauma – disproportion the mind during the period set aside for the questioning.⁶

This is important because it shows that ideas that we now associate with brainwashing had purchase before the term was coined. Timothy Melley has also suggested that Hunter may well have been in discussions with the CIA prior to the word being released into the public domain. He claims that they secretly invented and disseminated the idea as part of a propaganda campaign.⁷

At the time he claimed to have coined the term, Hunter was a long-standing CIA employee and had formerly been a “propaganda specialist” with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). He worked for Frank Wisner in the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC), which conducted covert propaganda and paramilitary operations.⁸ Schefflin and Opton describe how Wisner was determined that his office should function as a clandestine operation and should not be answerable to the CIA. They suggest that the release of this new word, and the new threat that it contained, was a tactic to maintain autonomy and to expand its scope. The timing of the release at the beginning of the war in Korea was perfect, and the outfit increased its human and financial resources as a result. In 1949, the OPC had 302 employees and a budget of about \$4.7 million. Three years later, the figures were over 5,000 and \$82 million, respectively.⁹

It is also interesting that in his original exposure of the practice, Hunter makes a clear distinction between brain-washing and brain-changing. He described brain-washing as akin to indoctrination and as a relatively simple procedure which drained ‘imperialist poisons’ from the mind. Brain-changing, however, meant that a person’s mind was emptied of all previous ideas and memories, ready to have a foreign ideology inserted into it.¹⁰ The two concepts soon meshed into the unhyphenated *brainwashing*, and ironically it was the idea of brain-changing which was pushed to the front. The

⁶ Paul Linebarger, ‘Future Work’, January 1945, Box 3, Harry Alltshuler Papers, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, Kansas University.

⁷ Timothy Melley, ‘Brain Warfare: The Covert Sphere, Terrorism, and the Legacy of the Cold War’, *Grey Room*, no. 45 (2011), 28.

⁸ Schefflin and Opton, *The Mind Manipulators*, 226.

⁹ Schefflin and Opton, 227.

¹⁰ Hunter, “‘Brain-Washing’ Tactics Force Chinese into Ranks of the Communist Party’.

distinction is a useful one, though; we can think of it, as does the literary scholar David Seed, as one between a hard and a soft form of brainwashing.¹¹ This can roughly be summed up as the difference between Hunter and social scientists such as Robert J. Lifton and Albert Biderman. The social scientists insisted that the idea was one which did no more than combine extant thoughts on propaganda and totalitarian coercion; Hunter and other CIA sources held that the communists wielded new technologies that were capable of rewiring any brain which came into their orbit. I stress this distinction because it illustrates the multiple meanings, ambiguities, and contradictions that were (deliberately) wrapped up in the concept from the outset. The appeal to science fiction as well as to scientific research and the crossovers between them is not unlike the American history of race that was explored in the previous chapter. Both concepts are hard to understand, discuss, or define without referencing historical events, cultural myths, literary and social commentary, and changing scientific perspectives.

Writing in 1956, Hunter says that the word came about because there was a vacuum in the language. Although there was a suspicion that the Soviets were using a range of tactics to create a “new Soviet man”, there was no word that tied these together. He does, at the same time, locate something different in the way that, so he claims, the Chinese thought they had been impacted since the communists came to power in 1949: something more had been done to them, he argued, than attempting to merely educate or persuade them. This was something which felt more like a medical treatment had been carried out on them.¹² As soon as he offers this idea, Hunter produces an image that is infused with stereotypes relating to the primitive: it was ‘like witchcraft, with its incantations, trances, poisons, and potions, with a strange flair of science about it all, like a devil dancer in a tuxedo, carrying his magic brew in a test tube.’¹³ The opening chapter of the book is full of such imagery in the most unexpected contexts. He writes that anyone wishing that the practice of brainwashing would disappear was as deluded as ‘the witch doctor I recently watched in the interior of Ceylon [who thought he]

¹¹ David Seed, *Brainwashing: The Fictions of Mind Control: A Study of Novels and Films since World War II* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2004), Ch. 2 Brainwashing Defined and Applied.

¹² Hunter, *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied It*, 5.

¹³ Hunter, 6.

could exorcise the evil spirits of kidney disease out of a Singhalese cook by all-night Kandyan dancing and frenetic tom-tom beating.’¹⁴

This stands in sharp contrast to Hunter’s original description of how brainwashing operated:

‘Brain washing’ takes place generally in group discussion meetings, either in a classroom set aside in the factory or plant, as a special indoctrination course while the student keeps his job, or in schools and institutions of so-called higher learning. What are called revolutionary universities are run by the Communist party, and are given over completely to ‘brain reform.’ The school day here may be from sunrise to sunset, and then the entire evening.¹⁵

This was the general description offered by Hunter in the original article and in his first book: an intense indoctrination programme based in the classroom supported by confessions made before the group and a rewriting of a person’s biography to coalesce with communist doctrines. This is a softer form of brainwashing in contrast to the harder, if fantastical, version that he would propagate during and after the Korean War.

Hunter later acknowledged that he was actually using a word which was already in use in China. This has usually been taken to be a translation of *hsi nao* (wash brain). However, the international legal theorist and historian Ryan Mitchell has recently offered a more detailed derivation. He locates the introduction of the idea of the washed brain to the turn of the twentieth century. Following the defeat of Emperor Guangxu’s ‘Hundred Days Reform’ by conservative forces in 1898, political writers such as Liang Qichao called for the ‘bare-handed forging of new brains.’ In an 1899 essay ‘Theory of Changing the Brain Essence of the National Citizenry’, Li Shiji wrote that the reformers must ‘wash away the millennia of dregs and filth from the brain matter of our countrymen, and project upon it the model of the modern world.’ This was taken up by several other leading intellectuals so that, as Mitchell puts it: ‘The new metaphor of “washing the brain” served well to encapsulate the aim of transforming China into a progressive, powerful, and scientifically modernised state no longer fettered by its

¹⁴ Hunter, 7.

¹⁵ Hunter, ““Brain-Washing” Tactics Force Chinese into Ranks of the Communist Party’, 2A.

traditional ideas.¹⁶ Mitchell goes on to show how the phrase ‘washing the heart’ was used in Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist religious contexts, and this continued to be the more widely used term, but the two were used together and became part of a wider and longer history of moral transformation practised right across the political spectrum.



'Adapt to the Times: One Must Always Keep Wiping Clean One's Brain', cartoon in the Beijing-based magazine *147 Huabao*, published in 1946 under Kuomintang rule. Source: 全国报刊索引 database.

Figure 2: Chinese brain cleaning cartoon

Mitchell's research is important because it reveals that metaphors of brainwashing and cleansing had a long history, with a key date of the late 1890s, and any links with communism were far from inextricable. As someone well versed in this history, Hunter should have been aware of this, but if he was, he chose to ignore it. The word was introduced into America just three months after the Korean War began, and it would come to be perhaps the main reason that the conflict is not quite the "Forgotten War" it is often known as.

¹⁶ Ryan Mitchell, 'China and the Political Myth of "Brainwashing"', *Made in China Journal* (blog), 8 October 2019, <https://madeinchinajournal.com/2019/10/08/china-and-the-political-myth-of-brainwashing/>.

The Korean War and Brainwashing Allegations

The Korean War (1950–1953) was essentially a civil war fought between North and South Korea separated by the 38th parallel of latitude north of the equator; it became a proxy war, with the North representing the communist forces of China and the Soviet Union, and the South representing an American-led United Nations coalition.¹⁷ It was remarkable for the ferocity of its fighting, and the protracted and ideological battles over prisoners and their repatriation. The military stalemate which was its eventual outcome is still in force today. It was also the first military venture that the United States pursued without officially enforcing racial segregation of its armed services. Negotiations between the belligerents were notable for the premium that was placed on the fate of prisoners. This was the first war in which the right of an individual to refuse to go back to their country of origin was declared as a fundamental human right, a right that was promoted particularly strongly by America and President Truman. This was part of a shift towards the battle for minds as much as for territory, although the two were linked. It was hoped that the result would be that if people were sent into battle through mental coercion, they would be easily persuaded to switch sides, and may make themselves prisoners if they knew that declining repatriation was a possible outcome.¹⁸ However, the prospect of American prisoners choosing communism was thought of as only theoretical. No American was thought capable of refusing repatriation as a rational decision; therefore, if any were to do so, it could only have been the result of foul play. But reports did emerge of widespread collaboration with captors, and strange letters sent from prisoners to their families rejecting America and all that it stood for. When American airmen confessed on camera to releasing germ weapons, the stories of brainwashing related by Hunter in 1951 were used to explain this deeply puzzling behaviour.

In 1953, the Peking Film Studio of China and the National Film Studio of Korea produced an eighty-minute documentary, *Oppose Bacteriological Warfare*, purporting to show the dropping of germ weapons on Korea and China by the Americans, along with

¹⁷ For good general histories of the conflict see: Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010). Michael Hickey, *The Korean War* (New York: Overlook Press, 2000). Michael Pembroke, *Korea: Where the American Century Began*, 2018. Stanley Sandler, *The Korean War: No Victors, No Vanquished* (London: UCL Press, 1999).

¹⁸ Carruthers, *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing*, 9.

its after-effects. It showed American pilots confessing to the use of bacteriological weapons in missions over Korea and China. Representatives from the CIA, the Psychological Strategy Board (PSB), the Departments of State and Defense, the Army, and the Air Force convened at a meeting on 3 March 1953 to view the film and agree a response to it.¹⁹ The evidence for brainwashing, it seemed, amounted to an interpretation by American commentators of the performances of such captives on screen. Had they been hypnotised or were they expressing guilt? Were the Chinese interrogators examples of Oriental mental magicians, or Soviet-inspired Pavlovian scientists? It was agreed that the narrative of brainwashing would be used as a means of making sense of these strange, unsettling images of American subjugation. It was this film which led to the CIA deciding that they should liaise with government agencies and their media contacts to publicise new threats of brainwashing. The allegations of brainwashing could then be linked to the confessions of the airmen and provide an explanation for why they would have conducted themselves in such a way. Very soon, the syndicated Labour journalist Victor Riesel, a close associate of Edward Hunter, wrote about the bacteriological warfare film. He spoke of the airmen being in a hypnotic state and suggested that use of the phrase 'thought conclusion' in their account was proof that they had been conditioned.²⁰ Cultural historian Hugh Wilford has alleged that Riesel was a covert agent of the CIA from the early 1950s.²¹

Three weeks after Riesel's warnings, Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine used her syndicated column to prime her readers to expect strange sights when prisoners began to return from Korea. Smith would have been alert to such stories as she was a strong supporter of the armed services and was known as 'Mother of the WAVES' due to her introduction of the legislation that brought into being in July 1942 the United States Naval Reserve (otherwise known as Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service).²² In her column, Smith made a reference to the use of a 'blaze of brilliant lights night and day for week after week', which she posited as the main tactic

¹⁹ 'Material for PSB Luncheon Re Brainwashing' (CIA, 5 March 1953), CIA-RDP80-01065A000600100001-0, General CIA Records.

²⁰ Victor Riesel, 'Help Needed to Expose Red Chinese Movie About POW's Confessions', *Williamsport Sun-Gazette*, 3 April 1953, 26.

²¹ Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 246.

²² Hope Stoddard, *Famous American Women* (New York: Crowell, 1970), 394.

of the 'brain wash' method. She suggested that the "confessions" of germ warfare had undoubtedly been procured under this method or through the use of drugs. However, she was confident that the 'defense department will take such American prisoners of war who have so succumbed to the Red "brain wash" and put them through a reindoctrination of Americanism, American principles, and the American concept of life.'²³

A week later, Edward Hunter was featured in a number of newspapers predicting that the Chinese 'will soon announce that a large number of Americans captured in Korea "do not want to come home"'. He said that this would be because the Chinese had the opportunity to practise their 'quack-psychiatry and fake evangelism'. They would have used 'every artifice of the mental doctor and the confessional priest' through the medium of hypnosis. If this failed to completely subdue the subject, said Hunter, a spinal injection of 'truth serum' would have been used on them. This was standard practice, Hunter concluded.²⁴ The cultural historian Matthew Dunne says that Hunter was interviewed by government officials from the Psychological Strategy Board (PSB)²⁵ in the weeks before he went to the press with his fears about what was taking place in Korea.²⁶

Bright lights, truth serums, and hypnosis, were never mentioned in the evidence given by the men returning from Korea. The truth was far more prosaic, even if undoubtedly difficult to withstand; however, the idea of something Oriental and unbearable was far more compellingly captured in the fantastical realm of visual assaults and hypnotic malpractice. Importantly, though, it was the concerns over the impact of a film that acted as a spur to propagate stories of brainwashed American prisoners. The film could show that the Americans had not only suffered the indignity of bodily capture, their minds were held captive too, with the evidence committed to celluloid. Also important is that when it was written about, it was the imagery that we

²³ Margaret Chase Smith, 'Red "Brain Wash" Technique Brings Warning from Senator', *Battle Creek Enquirer*, 24 April 1953, 6.

²⁴ Edward Hunter, 'Warns Reds Will Say GIs Don't Want to Go Home', *Hammond Times*, 31 March 1953, Main edition, 3.

²⁵ This was a working group set up by the CIA to look into evidence of brainwashing. It was also intended to think of techniques that could be used by the US.

²⁶ Dunne, *A Cold War State of Mind*, 29.

might have associated with fictional, cinematic accounts – bright lights, hypnosis, drugs – that came into play.

Sure enough, on 4 April 1953, reports began to emerge from Washington of fears that as many as a hundred of the three thousand Americans thought to be held prisoner ‘might have had their minds twisted into a decision against freedom’. The reports also mentioned ‘extended interrogations under bright lights.’²⁷ Then, on 13 April 1953, the Defense Department issued a fact sheet on the subject of brainwashing as part of a warning that some of the returnees might appear as if they had been converted to the cause of communism. Indicating that the whole story might be too grim to relate, the department said that it was not able to provide all of the details, but they had become aware of enough to know that ‘The thoughts and philosophies of a life-time can sometimes be swept out of the mind and the doctrine of communism eased in to replace them.’ There were few details, and much of what there was seems relatively innocuous: the report evinced horror at a list of rules outside a re-education classroom. They were: ‘No sleeping during class; silence during class hours; no smoking during class.’²⁸

When negotiations for a ceasefire and truce did end, there were 23 Americans who declared that they wished to live in China rather than return to the United States. The men were adamant that race was one of the main reasons behind their decision. In a shared statement for distribution in the American press, they said that they could not ignore the racism in America that led to ‘the lynching of Willie McGee and dozens of other Negroes since we have been prisoners.’²⁹ The men declared their love for America, but claimed that during their time held prisoner, ‘For the first time we saw a society where racial discrimination does not exist.’³⁰ Most newspapers gave only a condensed version of the statement and gave precedence to the perception that the men looked healthy and that they were seen enthusiastically singing communist anthems. Baltimore’s *Evening Sun* was typical in giving no mention of race other than to relate that ‘There were three Negroes.’³¹

²⁷ “‘Brain Wash’ of American PWs Feared’, *Palm Beach Post*, 4 April 1953, 1,6.

²⁸ ‘U.S. Issues Brain Wash Fact Sheet’, *Arizona Republic*, 13 April 1953, Second edition, 1.

²⁹ ‘Pro-Commie Yanks Released, Lash U.S.’, *Long Beach Independent*, 24 September 1953.

³⁰ ‘Pro-Commie Yanks Released, Lash U.S.’

³¹ ‘Reds Give Neutrals 23 Pro-Red Gl’s’, *The Evening Sun*, 24 September 1953, 1.

There were some who found this unsurprising. In a letter to the *Chicago Defender*, it was claimed that, ‘These three have had their brains washed every day from the date they were born under the American way of life as it applies to Negroes.’³² But three out of 23 was not a disproportionate number, and there were hundreds of black prisoners who chose to return home. It would be difficult to assert on such a basis that black Americans were more susceptible to brainwashing or that they felt less loyalty to America. A remarkable fact from Korea, given the scares attached to the conflict was that, in the memorable words of Susan Carruthers, ‘the nearest that the POWs in Korea came to demonstrating any kind of “Pavlovian” reflexive instinct was their knee-jerk reaction against Communists.’³³

Edward Hunter did devote an entire chapter to the subject of black American susceptibilities in his second full-length treatment of brainwashing in 1956. Hunter lauded the contribution of what he referred to as ‘dark-skinned Americans’, but this was based on an idea that they had performed well because they were less open-minded than some white Americans and therefore ‘retained a far greater capacity than the white man to keep his mind focused on fundamentals. He was far more difficult to lure off the track than his white brethren.’³⁴ He referred to them as being ‘simple in nature’ and trusting in America. When the Chinese showed them newspaper clippings about the treatment of black people in America, according to Hunter, the typical black response was ‘What’s happened has happened ... there was a wonderful future ahead for both us and the whites’.³⁵ This benign attitude supposedly encountered by Hunter on his travels was different from some of the other accounts that have emerged from Korea. These stories describe racial tensions that were exploited by the Chinese captors to stretch divisions and generate conflict. They also suggest that many black prisoners, although keen to return to America, did so with questions about the social engineering maintaining the racist structures in which they had grown up.

³² Susan Carruthers, *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing*, 214.

³³ Susan L. Carruthers, ‘“Not Just Washed but Dry-Cleaned”: Korea and the “Brainwashing” Scare of the 1950s’, in *Cold-War Propaganda in the 1950s*, ed. Gary D. Rawnsley (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 61.

³⁴ Hunter, *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied It*, 92.

³⁵ Hunter, 94.

Korea and Race

Because many all-black army units were still stationed in Japan after the end of World War II, they were among the first to enter Korea. There were two full-scale black infantry regiments, the 24th Infantry Regiment and the 2nd Ranger Infantry Company, but there were hundreds of smaller units attached to various divisions. The majority of these units were devoted to service or transportation. This reflected the prevailing opinion in the army that blacks made poor combatants and were best restricted to menial duties under the command of white Southerners, who were thought to have a better understanding of how to manage them.³⁶ Despite Samuel Stouffer's report on World War II army operations, which showed that blacks objected to working under Southern whites, such deployment continued to be the norm; to make matters worse, commanding black troops was often seen as a "dumping ground" for those officers who were disparaged for their performance with white troops.³⁷ Within just two months of the start of the war, the *Pittsburgh Courier* was alleging that the 24th Infantry was being held to different standards than those which operated for white recruits. The newspaper reported how men had already seen forty days of consecutive combat with no relief and yet they were treated with contempt by their white officers and regularly had their morale undermined.³⁸ Executive Order 9981, to allow desegregated forces, had been one of Truman's landmark legislative initiatives in 1948, but it had generated little meaningful integration in the army. Black battalions were allowed to form part of a white regiment, but it would often be maintained as a segregated unit and would not be allowed to use the same facilities as white fighters.³⁹

Immediately after Truman had signed off his order, the army Chief of Staff, General Omar Bradley was quoted as saying that "The Army will put men of different races in different companies. It will change that policy when the Nation as a whole changes

³⁶ George Cooper, 'African Americans in the Korean War: Forgotten Warriors of the Forgotten War' (Korean War Conference: Commemorating the 60th Anniversary, Victoria College, Texas, 2010), 2, <http://online.fliphtml5.com/xcx5/qfme/#p=3>.

³⁷ Melinda L. Pash, *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation: The Americans Who Fought the Korean War*, 2012, 169.

³⁸ Frank Whisonant, 'Was 24th "Framed"?', *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 September 1950, 5.

³⁹ Michael Lee Lanning, *The African-American Soldier: From Crispus Attucks to Colin Powell* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publ, 1997), 216.

it.⁴⁰ Bradley's apparent reticence was exceeded by his Secretary, Kenneth C. Royall, who told a gathering of service representatives, which included 16 black leaders, that 'segregation could exist without discrimination' and that even if his chief told him that units should be desegregated, he would not adopt it as a policy.⁴¹ Royall was adamant that the army should not be used as a means of social experimentation and that it was right and proper that the organisation should be reflective of wider social values, one of which he believed to be separate facilities for separate races. He also believed, as did many of his colleagues, that the use of black troops in mixed units, and in anything but the most menial of roles, would seriously reduce the effectiveness of the army. This position was maintained by the army's leaders, who believed that 'the Negro was unreliable as a combat soldier because he was cowardly.'⁴²

One of the conspicuous facts about Korea was the makeup of the troops, with the well-educated and well-connected largely absent (more so than in World War II), after having secured draft exemptions. The majority of the fighting force was made up of poor whites and minorities. By May 1951, black Americans accounted for about 13.5 per cent of the US strength in Korea, and this rose sharply before the end of the war.⁴³ During World War II, black Americans never accounted for more than ten per cent of the armed services. In theory, this should have still been the quota. Another striking fact about the war was its brutality. The first year of the war was particularly harsh, and for those who were captured, the prospect of starving to death was high. During the first six months of the war, 43 per cent of American prisoners died due to starvation. This compared with a death rate of 32 per cent during the American Civil War for those held at the notorious prison camp at Andersonville.⁴⁴ Temperatures were often freezing, and racial tensions came to the surface in such psychologically trying conditions. Clarence Adams, one of the American prisoners who chose to stay in China

⁴⁰ P.L. Prattis, 'Truman Aiming at Eventual End of Segregation in Armed Forces', *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 August 1948, 1.

⁴¹ Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939–1953* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 165–66.

⁴² Dalfiume, 188.

⁴³ Ron Theodore Robin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 166. Proportional figures have proven difficult to obtain, but by the end of the war there were at least 600,000 black Americans who had served in the military in Korea. 'African Americans in the Korean War', accessed 13 February 2020, <http://www.koreanwar60.com/african-americans-korean-war-1/>.

⁴⁴ Lech, *Broken Soldiers*, 2.

after the war, told of how in the first few months it was so cold, and general conditions were so bad, that 'we lost men who went outside the huts to relieve themselves. Often, they were too weak to make it to the latrine areas, and we'd find them later frozen, just outside the building.'⁴⁵ Adams provided a graphic account of the racial tensions that were at play in the camps. He described what happened to Aggie, a black 17-year-old who had badly infected legs as a result of an air strike:

A white guy who slept next to him became angry about the stench and called him 'a filthy n-----'. He then began kicking his wounded legs. The black soldiers in the room were furious. One of them shouted at him, 'Why are you doing that? You know he's not going to make it.' Later that night I heard someone crawl over me and jump this white prisoner. I could hear them struggling. The next morning, we found the white guy dead on the floor. Aggie was also dead.⁴⁶

He went on to recount how many white prisoners would 'openly call us n-----s and told us what they would do to us when they got us back in the States', and how this often led to fights. According to Adams, the Chinese found such situations bemusing, and he remembered this as being one of the main reasons that they began separating the prisoners by skin colour.⁴⁷

Given that most of the prisoners in Korea were captured in the first year of fighting, and that this was the period when battalions were still largely segregated units, it is likely that prisoners would have often split on racial lines. The formation of small tightly knit clubs on camps was a common form of resistance and sustenance in a hostile environment. There was evidence of Confederate symbols and flags being used as a marker of white solidarity and resistance to racial integration. Such Confederate displays received official backing from the Army, with a commanding general quoted in the *Pittsburgh Courier* describing how Dixie regalia 'adds colour, personality, and character to the division, and it stimulates enormous pride and esprit de corps in the organisation.'⁴⁸ The Ku Klux Klan also organised chapters within the camps.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁵ Clarence Adams, Della Adams, and Lewis H. Carlson, *An American Dream: The Life of an African American Soldier and POW Who Spent Twelve Years in Communist China* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 47.

⁴⁶ Adams, Adams, and Carlson, 50.

⁴⁷ Adams, Adams, and Carlson, 53–54.

⁴⁸ 'Army OKs Uniforms of "Rebels"', *Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 May 1952, 5.

⁴⁹ Michael Cullen, *Black Yanks in the Pacific: Race in the Making of American Military Empire after World War II* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 141.

Chinese sought to make the most of such separations by ensuring that the men were split on the basis of skin colour, allowing them to target disaffected black Americans with propaganda. One of the prisoners, Johnny Moore, told how ‘they would tell the blacks and poor that the rich business owners and government officials in the United States were treating them like cannon fodder.’⁵⁰ Robert Fletcher received such overtures but said that he was determined not to respond to anything that they said. Indeed, he objected to them thinking that he must have had little education in America and took to writing letters home in stereotypical black vernacular, so that he would receive better treatment through living down to their expectations. His conclusion of what he had learned from the Chinese was that ‘they did not like white people very much.’⁵¹

Edward Hunter argued that a closed mind – such as that demonstrated by Fletcher – was something that should be encouraged in all Americans as a means of dealing with communism, and that black Americans were more likely to benefit from this. He stated that to engage with a communist in open debate would be the same as allowing room for argument with a person who thought it was acceptable to violate young girls.⁵² Hunter even claimed that segregation in America might have helped the black prisoners because they ‘were strengthened by a sense of belonging in their own organisation, where the colour of their skin was the sole requirement for membership.’⁵³

Hunter is suggesting that the best American should be somehow whole and complete, and therefore resistant to communist advances. The historian Monica Kim, author of a notable recent history of the Korean War, argues that it was the *wholeness* of the American person that was supposed to make them impermeable to any

⁵⁰ Johnny Moore, *I Cannot Forget: Imprisoned in Korea, Accused at Home*, ed. Judith F. Gentry, 1st ed, Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series, no. 142 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013), 107.

⁵¹ Lewis H. Carlson, *Remembered Prisoners of a Forgotten War: An Oral History of the Korean War POWs*, 1st ed (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002), 193.

⁵² Hunter, *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied It*, 286. This is a feature of the 1949 drama *I Married a Communist* aka *The Woman on Pier 13*, in which the father, pretending to be a communist, is proud of his son when he refuses to even hear his explanations for taking up communism.

⁵³ Hunter, 96.

techniques the Chinese might have developed.⁵⁴ By this, she means that the American was held up as the living embodiment of freedom and therefore to reject this was to make oneself literally incoherent. The brainwashing narrative allowed the American public to accept them as vulnerable, but it also made them less than whole, with gaps that could be prodded by the skilled, seducing “Oriental” interrogator. Kim describes how unsettled the American army was by interrogations that tried to open up the prisoner to express his feelings. The final report of the Joint Japan Processing Board (JJPB) described the interrogation techniques that had been employed as ‘a lesson in the anatomy of seduction and subversion.’⁵⁵

The communist guards made various attempts to split the prisoners on the basis of colour or outer appearance, as for example referring to Koreans and Chinese as “white hats” and the Americans and the British as “black hats”; similarly, those who were thought to have accepted communist ideology were referred to as “beets” – red right through – and those who were mouthing the platitudes were “radishes” – only red on the outside.⁵⁶ It is important to dwell on these stories because they allow us to see that there was often a racial element to the everyday life in the camps that has not always received sufficient attention in histories of brainwashing. The cultural historian Ron Robin thought that the social scientists who provided accounts of what had taken place in Korea were guilty of offering inadequate analysis of these issues. He accused them of having ‘swept aside a host of challenging social and political issues associated with the POW experience. Their reports avoided the racial and ethnic composition of American POWs, and skirted the issue of social stratification in the armed forces and its impact on prison camps and battlefields.’⁵⁷ Robin contended that the reasons for this may have been well intended – responding to demands that class was a more productive vector of analysis – but that it led to inadequate depth in evaluations. He concluded that the impact of race on events in Korea, and the dynamic it played in the

⁵⁴ Monica Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 306.

⁵⁵ Kim, 338.

⁵⁶ Moore, *I Cannot Forget*, 107, 135.

⁵⁷ Robin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy*, 163.

camps, was probably understated because it did not align with the theoretical paradigms of the researchers and their mentors.⁵⁸

When black and white Americans did come together, it was often in a racially directed hatred of the Koreans. Both black and white Americans joined in, referring to the enemy as “hordes”, “swarms”, and “savages”. And such epithets were directed against the South Koreans as well as the North Koreans. They were referred to as “slant-eyed”, “monkeys”, “crafty”, and “fanatical”. Even black newspapers joined in, with the *Afro-American*, for example, describing ‘squalid enemy infested villages’ and labelling Korea the ‘filthiest place in the world’, populated by people who were ‘barbaric, cunning, or ungrateful’.⁵⁹

When the prisoners were finally released, many of them returned to America by ship, typically a two-week journey. During this time, some of those who have recounted their experiences have spoken of feeling like they were being interrogated all over again. And to some extent they were. The psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton conducted interviews on board the *General Pope*, and has acknowledged that as well as interviewing the repatriates for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes, there was also an investigative element to the process.⁶⁰ Robert Fletcher did not allege that it was the colour of his skin which made the interrogators classify him as a security risk, but he could see no good reason why he should have been regarded as one. Fletcher described how:

These American officers kept trying to trap us by repeating their questions. One lieutenant would ask a bunch of questions. Then another would combine and ask the same questions, just turned around a bit. They finally decided, ‘Fletcher knows more than he’s said. If he stays in the service, we need to interrogate him more intensely’. So they classified me as a security risk. I didn’t know about this until years later when I got my records under the Freedom of Information Act.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Robin, 174.

⁵⁹ Cullen, *Black Yanks in the Pacific*, 124–28.

⁶⁰ Robert J. Lifton, ‘Home by Ship: Reaction Patterns of American Prisoners of War Repatriated from North Korea’, *American Journal of Psychiatry* 110, no. 10 (1 April 1954): 732, <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.110.10.732>.

⁶¹ Carlson, *Remembered Prisoners of a Forgotten War*, 219.

Fletcher thought that this was typical, with the general approach being to treat the men as communists until they were convinced otherwise.

Some of the men on the ship remember the questioning as sometimes motivated by racial concerns. Jerry Morgan said that the black soldiers were segregated on the ships home and came in for special questioning. He said that they were interrogated at length on each of the 11 days that it took for them to get home.⁶² Michael Cromwell said that the interrogations were day-long affairs, eight hours of providing answers to repeated questions. Cromwell also captured the general paranoia that attached itself to the men, describing how his future father-in-law had him investigated before allowing him to marry his daughter: 'Damn right he did. He was going to make damn sure his daughter wasn't marrying a pinko.'⁶³ In Clarence Adams's case, when, after 12 years, he decided to return to the United States, he underwent a battery of interviews and tests.⁶⁴ He considered what he was put through by the CIA and the FBI to be far worse than anything done to him by the Chinese. When he did get home, he was subjected to death threats by the Ku Klux Klan, and was greeted by a mob outside his home.⁶⁵

Clarence Adams's testimony is interesting in that he saw his conversion to communism as a form of awakening to the terrible situation he had been born into as a black person in America. If there was any brainwashing taking place, Adams contended, it had taken place in America, where he was made to think of himself as an inferior citizen. He recalled being beaten up by a white man when he was just 12 years old for no other reason than the colour of his skin. His daughter also recalled him telling her how he had been part of a largely black battalion which had been instructed to stay in place and fend off the Chinese while white colleagues retreated. He took this as evidence that he would be sacrificed to protect more valuable white soldiers. Experiences such as these led him to accept the Chinese view of American history and politics. In Adams's words: 'Critics in America later called this brainwashing, but how can it be brainwashing if someone is telling you something that you already know is

⁶² Carlson, 219.

⁶³ Carlson, 220.

⁶⁴ Clarence Adams was one of the 21 American soldiers who stayed in China. He tells his story in Adams, Adams, and Carlson, *An American Dream*. They were joined by one British soldier.

⁶⁵ Carlson, *Remembered Prisoners of a Forgotten War*, 210.

true.⁶⁶ A former teacher of Adams was interviewed by Virginia Pasley as one of a series of interviews trying to work out why 22 prisoners decided to stay with the Chinese. The teacher inadvertently did more to support Adams's comment on how there might have been more brainwashing taking place at home than in the camp. She expressed her shock that 'Skippy' mentioned racism in his reasons for staying: 'He didn't leave Memphis with any of those feelings. The average coloured boy faces up to segregation and accepts it and goes on about his business.'⁶⁷ The expectation voiced here by Adams's teacher, that average coloured boys should accept their position in society, was similar to the accounts shared by Edward Hunter of black interviewees as 'simple natures' hoping for a 'bright future'.

The Steel Helmet

The first film released with the Korean War as its central theme was Samuel Fuller's *The Steel Helmet* (1951). The movie was in cinemas just seven months after the outbreak of war. One of the central figures was the black Corporal Thompson, played by James Edwards. Although Thompson has more depth as a character than the shallow subjects Hunter apparently encountered on his travels, he does mouth essentially the same comments: that change is coming and America is a country worth fighting for. However, this message was not delivered with sufficient precision for some. Victor Riesel – a colleague and friend of Hunter – used his syndicated column to attack the film and its director. Riesel was particularly exercised by the idea of communist infiltration of Hollywood and referred to 'Brother Fuller' in his piece. Riesel described the film as harmful propaganda 'in this tense day of psychological, as well as shooting war.' He took particular exception to a scene in which he says that '... The Communist is firm and decisive and has the answers while the GI is weak and fumbling and doesn't know what to answer.' Riesel ended the article suggesting that Fuller would be investigated: 'that's not the end of the army's interest in this Fuller man. Who is he anyhow? Hollywood labour leaders amongst others, are eager to know.'⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Adams, Adams, and Carlson, *An American Dream*, 55.

⁶⁷ Virginia Pasley, *22 Stayed* (London: W.H. Allen, 1955), 111.

⁶⁸ Victor Riesel, 'What Goes On Here?', *The Tennessean*, 17 January 1951, 9. Riesel had peppered other articles with mentions of brainwashing such as Victor Riesel, 'Reds Seize on Adlai Remark', *Miami News*, 15 October 1952, 11, in which he also referred to the 'thought-police'. Samuel Fuller was in fact renowned for his independent uncompromising approach to

The Steel Helmet contains two scenes which directly address race. The protagonist in both scenes is a North Korean major being held by the Americans, and known only as The Red (Harold Fong). In the first, he questions Corporal Thompson (James Edwards). The shot begins with a track around three men, the third being the white Sergeant Zack (Gene Evans). Zack moves away, and the camera dissolves into a tighter shot as The Red tries to lock eyes with Thompson. He tells him that he cannot understand how he is fighting for America when he is not allowed to sit where he wants to on a bus. Thompson prefers to see this as evidence of progress, as a hundred years ago he could not even ride the bus: 'There's some things you just can't rush, buster.' As they speak, Thompson is applying white dressing to the chest (over the heart) of The Red.⁶⁹ Once rebuffed by Thompson, The Red spits in contempt. This is an act usually associated in cinema with the portrayal of the racially inferior, compelled to react physically to their inner feelings. In *No Way Out* (1950), for example, one of the ways that the white character played by Richard Widmark is shown to be inferior to the black character played by Sidney Poitier, is through spitting.

Shortly after this encounter, The Red tries to make the same kind of connection with Sergeant Tanaka (Richard Loo), a Japanese American. He begins by saying that they both have the same kind of eyes, and that the Americans hate both of them because of their eyes. The camera moves in for a close two-shot and The Red asks whether Tanaka, or his parents, were imprisoned by the Americans during World War II. Tanaka acknowledges that this was a period of American history which has left its mental scars, admitting: 'You rang the bell that time.' He soon regains composure, though, and talks with pride of the Purple Heart he was awarded for his part in the European campaign. The Red says that he cannot understand how he can fight for a country that would call him a 'dirty Jap rat'. Tanaka tells him that he is not 'a dirty Jap rat', he is an American. 'And if we get pushed around back home, well that's our business. But we don't like it when we get pushed around by ... aahhh ... I'll knock

filmmaking. He would make another film set in Korea later that year *Fixed Bayonets!* and was as likely to be accused of right-wing sympathies as left-wing propagandaism.

⁶⁹ This is a repeat of a medical role which had become a feature of the roles given to black actors postwar. Three of the films released as part of the first cycle were based around medical roles for the black character (*Lost Boundaries*, *Pinky*, and *No Way Out*). And Edwards had played the black patient being healed by the white psychiatrist in the first of that cycle, *Home of the Brave*.

off before I forget the Articles of War and snap those rabbit teeth of yours out one at a time.'



Figure 3: The Red asks Tanaka about Japanese internment.



Figure 4: The Red senses Tanaka's unease.

In each of these scenes, it is the prisoner who is interrogating the captor. The Red is shown as cunning, devious, and waiting for an opportunity to take advantage of any perceived weakness in his captors. This, of course, plays on well-worn stereotypes of the “Oriental”, but it also reveals him focusing his efforts on the two people whom he has selected as less than completely embraced by American values of equality and freedom. The Red is shown to be wrong, with Thompson and Tanaka both declaring their commitment to their country, but the argument he makes is absolutely rational: Why are you risking your lives for a country that treats you as second-class citizens and has enslaved and imprisoned you in its recent history? The Red seems genuinely bewildered. ‘I don’t get you’, he says. And yet as a viewer, we are clearly positioned and manoeuvred to take the side of the Americans. Harold Fong is pictured as trying

to draw the men into his stare. Both refuse. He pounces when he thinks that he might have hit a nerve with Tanaka. The camera emphasises his jagged teeth. This plays upon stereotypes of Asians as being buck-toothed and echoes the comment made by Tanaka about his 'rabbit teeth'.⁷⁰ And rather than hearing the two declarations of loyalty to America as irrational, we hear them as brave, patient, and appreciative of a bigger picture. We may well oppose this reading, but as viewers familiar with the vocabulary of cinema we will experience this as a resistance.

Sleeper Agents and Mulattos

Victor Riesel's criticism of the film reads oddly, given how emphatically Thompson and Tanaka reject the overtures of *The Red*. But what Riesel recognises, and what he may be worrying about, is how the cinema audience will react to *The Red*'s remarks. The communist is described as 'firm and decisive', whereas the American 'has no idea why he's fighting or doesn't really believe he should be fighting.'⁷¹ Riesel was hinting at something that would become a dominant narrative in anxieties around Korea, that the problem was not in the prison camps but in America. Specifically, it was with a generation who had not been sufficiently indoctrinated with American values. The Defense Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War concluded in their 1955 report, reviewing Korean prisoners, that better education and training would enable future prisoners to resist brainwashing techniques.⁷² For this, everyone shouldered responsibility. As Hunter put it, echoing the findings of the report:

There can be neither front nor rear, for the great lesson that came from the brainwashing chambers was that while every man has a cracking point, every man's cracking point can be immensely strengthened. That is the job of home, school, and church. The mother, teacher, and pastor are in the front lines in this ideological conflict, and every word they say to their sons and daughters is important to the struggle, for character more than anything else will determine the outcome.⁷³

⁷⁰ Perhaps also calling to mind the controversial short Warner Bros. cartoon *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips* (1944).

⁷¹ Riesel, 'What Goes On Here?'

⁷² US Defense Advisory Committee, 'POW, the Fight Continues after the Battle: The Report of the Secretary of Defense's Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War.' (U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1955), 14.

⁷³ Hunter, *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied It*.

The clarity of the communist position and the uncertainty of the American soldier left a gap for wily Chinese and Koreans to exploit. The marginalisation and discrimination of non-whites could make them particularly vulnerable. And this heightened concerns that those returning from Korea might have been ideologically contaminated in ways that would not be obvious in their appearance or their actions.

The war correspondent Eugene Kinkead's *Every War but One* (1959) offered a damning account of the performance of troops in Korea. He argued that unlike the generations of recruits that had come before them, the American POWs in Korea had let their country down. Furthermore, Kinkead expressed concern that on their return they would act to undermine the country's security. Kinkead told of how there was a special interrogation team of three officers in the Army's Far East Command and of how they had marked out 75 individuals they considered to be a threat in terms of becoming a spy or an agent for the communists on their return to America. Kinkead termed such agents 'sleepers', as they do not appear on the outside to be communists.⁷⁴ He said:

Because of this protective colouration it would have been extremely difficult for us to ferret them out later had they originally slipped by us. A further difficulty was that the men were instructed to behave in a highly conforming sort of way for a good many years after repatriation, attracting no attention, and certainly not engaging in any radical activities.⁷⁵

This calls to mind one of the figures which created similar fears for many Americans at this same time: the 'passing mulatto'. This figure had a comparable 'protective colouration', making it difficult for them to be seen. The 'passing mulatto' could only with the greatest difficulty be 'ferreted out'. Kinkead claimed that these sleeper agents would act in 'a highly conforming sort of way' in order not to attract attention. And, of course, the aim of the communist, in the eyes of Kinkead and like-minded warriors, was to turn others into their likeness by wiping out their current identity as an

⁷⁴ The first use of 'sleeper agent' is thought to be in 1948 as the title of a short story by the Danish novelist I.B. Melchior, who had served in the Counterintelligence Corps of the US Army during World War II. It was taken up by J. Edgar Hoover two years later when writing about the underground tactics of communists. See 'What Does Sleeper Cell Mean?', accessed 1 November 2019, <https://www.dictionary.com/e/politics/sleeper-cell/>.

⁷⁵ Eugene Kinkead, *In Every War but One* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959), 78.

American. The alleged aim of the mulatto was also to take over the racial identity of their sexual partner(s).

This is another example of the plethora of descriptions and warnings which had developed around brainwashing in its Korean context. These were infused with concerns around race and miscegenation. Such concerns were still then prominent – but officially discouraged – and emphasised threats of takeover, contamination, and impurity. Hunter's conclusion to *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied It* offers another instance of such a takeover of identity. He wrote how:

The intent is to change a mind radically so that its owner becomes a living puppet – a human robot – without the atrocity being visible from the outside. The aim is to create a mechanism in flesh and blood, with new beliefs and new thought processes inserted into a captive body. What that amounts to is the search for a slave race that, unlike the slaves of olden times, can be trusted never to revolt, always to be amenable to orders, like an insect to its instincts.⁷⁶

The almost total absence of references to race and cinema in Hunter's first book is a striking contrast to his second. In his second, a full chapter is devoted to demonstrating the admirable closed-mind of the American Negro; another details his attempts to track down a film showing Pavlovian experiments on conditioned reflexes. Film is presented as a key part of Soviet aims to exert mind control over its own people and others. But the response of Riesel to *The Steel Helmet*, set alongside the reaction of Frantz Fanon to *Home of the Brave* (as witnessed at the end of the previous chapter), shows that American film too was far more than benign entertainment. Fanon's heart made his head swim as he waited with anticipation and apprehension in the movie theatre; Riesel contacted his army and labour acquaintances to look into the film's director. Film mattered. Just how much, to whom, and to what ends, is the focus of Part Two.

⁷⁶ Hunter, *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied It*, 309.

*I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving
images.*
Georges Duhamel¹

Part Two

Captive Audiences

¹ Georges Duhamel, *America the Menace*, trans. Charles Miner. Thompson (Allen & Unwin, 1931), 52.

Chapter 4 – Film, Race, and the Birth of a Nation

We can make them see things happen before their eyes until they cry in anguish.
Thomas Dixon¹

The central focus of this second part of the thesis is a clutch of American films that were made between 1942 and 1950. They encompass a breadth of styles, techniques, and intentions. Some were made for military training with limited consideration for aesthetic appeal; others were made with generous budgets and at least one eye on securing a place in histories of Hollywood films: for subject matter, audience reaction, or box-office receipts. My argument is not that these productions should be considered as technologies of brainwashing; rather it is to show that there were heightened claims, and concerns about, the propaganda promises of film at this time. Therefore, because cinema was so popular and was regarded by many people as potentially manipulative, we should examine how it was used: note its engagements with agencies of social control, and take interest in those films where we can see clear attempts to influence audiences and engineer public opinion. If, as I contend, there are interesting and revealing parallels to be drawn between the introduction of the concept of brainwashing and existing structures of racism, then cinema is a medium in which some of these correspondences would be rehearsed and played out.

The feature of the films I investigate is their engagement with America's racial history. I am also interested here in their projection of that history to a local, national, or global audience. However, viewing the films demonstrates that race cannot be viewed on its own; it involves mapping many intersections: with class, gender, sexuality, colour, and mental and physical health.² This necessitates a survey of how racial issues interacted with various other concerns in that period: hesitancy over the

¹ Michele Gillespie and Randal L Hall, eds., *Thomas Dixon Jr. and the Birth of Modern America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 44.

² For good recent works on the importance of an intersectional approach see Anna Carastathis, *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons*, Expanding Frontiers: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016). Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality*, Key Concepts Series (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016). Ange-Marie Hancock, *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). For its application to film studies, see Corinn Columpar, 'The Gaze as Theoretical Touchstone: The Intersection of Film Studies, Feminist Theory, and Postcolonial Theory', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 1/2 (2002): 25–44.

return of the military veteran; the role of women; sexual anxieties around normality and deviancy; the communist; the physically maimed; and the mentally disturbed.

Before embarking on this exploration, it is necessary to contextualise the history of cinema at the time of the study. Less than fifty years old, it had undergone a host of technological, stylistic, and structural changes. From its outset though, its powers as a medium had been contested. For some, it was unworthy of being treated with any seriousness; little more than an outgrowth of vaudeville and melodrama, a means of satiating the mind rather than controlling it in any way. Others though fretted over its mimetic potential, the japes and crimes which were at the heart of many narratives acting as provocative learning material for eager but immature minds. Some thought that the unique danger of the medium combined each of these characterisations: its deleterious power arising out of the hypnotic spell of its magical representations, potentially incendiary material in the wrong hands. This chapter chronicles some of the key events in this history. I stress how cinema has been an important component in the consolidation of stereotypes applied to black Americans in the twentieth century. Next, I consider and assess how crucial in this history was D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). I show how the repercussions of this particular film made it difficult for the industry to act as a driver of racial tolerance and civil rights in the 1940s. It is also important to place Griffith's film in context and not to treat it as an isolated cultural artefact. Indeed, it is crucial to recognise that some of the entanglements of cinema and racism stretch back to the emergence of cinema in the 1890s. And they tighten some of the anxieties over the visible register that we encountered earlier in the case of *Plessy v Ferguson*.³

Griffith himself had been an important contributor to the development of cinema and in many ways *The Birth of a Nation* was a crystallisation of the cinematic techniques and storytelling methods he had helped to craft. It was also, to be sure, a deeply racist work. However, to be more specific, it was a work that operated as an important anti-miscegenationist filmed tract. The purpose of the film was not so much to advance an argument against freedom for black Americans, even if it purported to show that they were incapable of exercising it at the highest levels. Rather, it constructed a visual argument against any social equality that might in turn lead to mixed-race marriages

³ See Introduction pp 21–27.

and mulatto offspring. It could be viewed indeed as a plea that white men use their eyes well, and that society should be structured to enable this. Specifically, this meant not being taken in by the confusing sight of the light-skinned mulatto that was, according to Griffith, the blight of the nation. In the context of 1915 then – with worries over immigration, the purity of white American stock, the migration of black people from the South to the North - it was a demand that segregation laws should be tightened and extended. The film provided a rationale for the view that anti-miscegenation statutes should be made more rigid and strictly enforced. During the 1920s, segregation laws were indeed extended and the registration of race and marriages was meticulously legislated. Such bureaucracy reached some kind of pinnacle with the Virginia Racial Integrity Act of 1924, vigorously pursued by the state's first registrar of vital statistics, Walter Plecker, to ensure that all sanctioned marriages in the state were between either "pure" whites or others. This was a literal enforcement of "one-drop" ideology. It declared a state law to be too liberal because it had previously permitted marriage where the blood quantum was no more than one-sixteenth "negro".⁴ The historian Peggy Pascoe has described this period as one when 'the movement for white supremacy spread its tentacles through American society'.⁵ These legal enforcements of segregation took place at the same time as the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, which from its modern rebirth at the time of Griffith's film being released, had seen its membership grow to as many as five million by 1925.⁶

One of the consequences of Griffith's film on the future of cinema was to ensure that black Americans went largely unrepresented on the nation's screens in the interwar period, except in the guise of servants and entertainers.⁷ Where they were shown, they were largely incidental to the narrative of the film and served as little more than scenery (but scenery that reinforced the racist hierarchical message nonetheless). Such excisions and erasures are important because they illustrate how cinema was an important component of the 'milieu control' I am claiming was instrumental in

⁴ Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 140.

⁵ Pascoe, 134.

⁶ Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), xi.

⁷ Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 16–17. For a similar account which nevertheless picks out some positive interwar developments see Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*, Chapter 4.

influencing how white Americans viewed black people during the twentieth century. The absence or deliberate insignificance of black representation on screen reflected and reinforced the demand for segregation in reality.

From its release in 1915, *The Birth of a Nation* generated much debate about the nature of film and its potential impact on the behaviour and attitudes of its audiences. Such debates had long-lasting effects: for instance, partly out of this grew many organisations, pieces of legislation, and studies. I conclude the chapter with a review of these debates and studies and their implications for the representation of black people in cinema. First, I explore the fears that were expressed about early cinema audiences and the powerful effects that the space of the cinema and its audiences were thought to exert on each other.

Early Cinema and its Audiences

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a variety of influential writers, on both sides of the Atlantic, had worried about the deleterious effect of the crowd on individual fortitude. The most famous written manifestation of this form of anxiety about mass phenomena, Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd*, was published around the same time as the emergence of cinema, published in France in 1895 and translated into English the following year.⁸ In America, Boris Sidis published *The Psychology of Suggestion* (1898) in which he lamented that 'intensity of personality is in inverse proportion to the number of aggregated men.'⁹ Le Bon compared the displays of hysterics at Charcot's clinic within the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris to the mental contagion that spread through the crowd. Sigmund Freud, of course, was similarly influenced by the teachings and demonstrations he saw at the Salpêtrière; he also referred to Le Bon in his own work on crowds, most directly in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921). Freud elaborated at length on the threat of the crowd, and the need for social forces similar to the ego and the superego to distil, transform and mould the unruly and disruptive energies and drives of the id.¹⁰ And for this, images

⁸ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd* (London: Ernest Benn, 1896).

⁹ Boris Sidis, *The Psychology of Suggestion* (New York: Appleton, 1898), 299.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Liveright, 1967).

were indispensable. Freud wrote: ‘Groups demand illusions and cannot do without them. They constantly give what is unreal precedence over what is real.’¹¹

The ability of symbols and illusions to influence cinema audiences was only made more potent by the nature of those early gatherings. Early cinema was imbricated in other entertainments and technologies of the time, usually part of vaudeville shows, which were imbued with racial stereotypes and modes of racial performance.¹² In *Babel and Babylon*, Miriam Hansen’s expert overview of the development of early cinema, the film historian describes how ‘early cinema relied for its subject matter and representational strategies on a vast repertoire of commercial amusements that flourished around the end of the century.’¹³ She mentions minstrel and magic shows, burlesque, and dance. Viewer expectations were also informed by the magic lantern and stereopticon shows. When the Vitascope Hall opened in Buffalo, New York, in October 1896, the local newspaper expressed enthusiasm for:

forms of entertainment which delight the eye and ear while instructing the mind ... you may see life-size moving figures upon the canvas which seem to breathe, two jolly darkies eating watermelons for a wager, the fourth round of the Corbett and Courtney fight, a scene with a bucking broncho in a Buffalo show, a bathing scene at Atlantic City, a wrestling match, etc., etc.

However, this experience was located as just one of many audio-visual delights that a spectator could enjoy in the hall, and other media were given even more praise: ‘Upstairs you may see and hear almost anything you wish through the kinetoscope and phonograph. But, more wonderful still, and far more novel, are the revelations of the X rays.’¹⁴ Here we see the motion picture as just one of a variety of technologies that offered the consumer new and revealing ways of viewing the world. There was already an element of voyeurism implied in some of the suggestive phrasing, such as ‘see and hear almost anything you wish’, and there was an emphasis on the replication of reality, particularly with reference to the projections being life-size. At the same time, the

¹¹ Freud, 19–20.

¹² See Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, 20th-anniversary edition ed., Race and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

¹³ Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 29.

¹⁴ ‘The Marvels of Vitascope Hall’, *The Buffalo Enquirer*, 9 November 1896, 5.

projectionist was keen to show that the image was produced by still photographs the size of a postage stamp, thus drawing attention to the surreal aspect of the medium.

Film is complex. It at once promises to help us see better while often delighting in special effects and trickery which fool the senses. And this is not merely a question of special effects. To name just a few of the ways in which cinema exerts a strange pull towards a counter-intuitive verisimilitude: still images which appear to move, the illusion of depth on a flat screen, and sudden switches in perspective and time which somehow makes us think that we see more clearly. To view a film is to willingly enter an illusory world which offers empirical proofs and refutations. As one of its pioneers, the inventor William K.L. Dickson expressed it: ‘in the advancement of science, in the relation of unguessed worlds, in its educational and re-creative powers, and in its ability to immortalize our fleeting but beloved associations, the kinetograph stands foremost among the creations of modern inventive genius.’¹⁵ At its conception, then, cinema was a hybrid mix of science, magic, minstrelsy, and vaudeville. It was therefore imbued from the start with racist stereotypes. But more than this it was presenting these images in a place of heightened sensation, with a gloss of scientific credibility, a setting seen as dangerously conducive to contagious crowd reactions.

The cinema space itself was certainly often presented as hazardous to public morals, a place where the less desirable members of society would often meet and where sex and crime could prosper in its darkened corners.¹⁶ This more sinister aspect of the movie theatre was stressed by Paul G. Cressey in a later unpublished study, originally intended to form part of the Payne Fund Studies, discussed later in the chapter. Cressey’s study (carried out around 1932) was an account of the social setting of the cinema and he wrote of how the unsupervised and darkened theatre allowed ‘opportunities for clandestine contacts’. Far from discouraging nefarious practices, the movie theatre, so this argument went, projected images of lovemaking and criminal activity that spurred those watching to indulge in such behaviour there and then.

¹⁵ ‘MoMA | Advent of Cinema’, accessed 5 December 2019, https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/film/advent-of-cinema/.

¹⁶ Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 63.

Cressey suggested that this would then act as more potent voyeuristic material for those so minded who were in attendance.¹⁷

Importantly, the movie theatre was also an overwhelmingly white space, both in terms of audience and content. Because of this, the cinema was a useful instrument in encouraging the idea of an American melting pot where various nationalities and ethnicities were able to congregate and celebrate their shared values. Helping to stir this pot, by bringing together otherwise diverse people, was the prohibition of black people from the cinema itself and their absence or crass representation on screen. Equally, the often pronounced white makeup that was used on the faces of the screen stars, along with their extraordinary glamour, meant that they were unattainable for the whole audience: the Italians and the Irish just as much as the Germans and the English.¹⁸ The aspirations and the fantasies they aroused were another means of bringing together a disparate audience, one in which many Italians and Irish would have had lived experience of being classed as nearer black than white.¹⁹

An important development in the crystallisation of whiteness was the dominance of narrative cinema. Hansen states that between 1907 and 1908 the number of narrative films increased from 67 to 96 per cent.²⁰ The audience had to move away from the idea of a show to one of a visual story. This required the creation of an invisible gaze. Film styles and techniques of framing, composition, and editing, were developed with the intention that the spectator should become more absorbed in the screen and unaware of their surroundings. But such absorption was more difficult for the black viewer. The racialised space of the cinema and the movies themselves worked towards the integration of those claiming whiteness and the marginalisation of those deemed to be

¹⁷ Paul G. Cressey, 'The Community: A Social Setting for the Motion Picture', in *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy*, by Garth S. Jowett, Ian C. Jarvie, and Kathryn H. Fuller, Cambridge Studies in the History of Mass Communications (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 168–71.

¹⁸ This declarative whiteness that became part of early cinema is well documented in: Foster, *Performing Whiteness*.

¹⁹ See Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*. David A. Gerber and Alan M. Kraut, *American Immigration and Ethnicity: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). 'Opinion | How Italians Became "White"', *The New York Times*, 14 October 2019, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/12/opinion/columbus-day-italian-american-racism.html>.

²⁰ Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 43–44.

black. The early cinema scholar Jacqueline Najuma Stewart shows how black viewers were positioned to recognise themselves as inferior and as a potential impediment to the enjoyment of their white superiors. Black patrons were compelled to sit in balconies or to the edges of the theatre, from where they would see that their marginalisation or absence – the spatial hegemony of the theatre – was replicated on the screen.²¹

What would black spectators have seen reflected back of their own existence as black people from the screen in the embryonic years of American cinema? The titles of some films from that era offer a clear indication: *Chicken Thieves* (1897), *Watermelon Contest* (1899), *Prize Fight in Coon Town* (1902), *How Rastus Got His Pork Chops* (1908), *How Rastus Got His Turkey* (1909) and *The Octoroon* (1913). Black representation was largely confined to a tight range of such stereotypes around eating and stealing. Stewart argues that such films ‘enable a sense of white, visual mastery over Black objects by confirming their knowability, policing their difference, and exposing their transgressions’.²² She terms this the ‘look of surveillance’, an attempt to restrict black people to their place which was being complicated by the growing mobility of black people, with increased migration from the South to the urban North. Between 1910 and 1920 around 454,000 black Americans migrated from the South to the North, in comparison to 170,000 who had done so between 1900 and 1910. Between 1920 and 1930 the figure grew to 749,000, only to decline in the 1930s due to the Great Depression.²³

A central feature of this mobility was the train. And, as we saw at the outset of this study such mobility could cause confusion for the white passengers and employees. The initial “error” around the identity of Pinky was caused by her seating on the train. We also saw the pivotal case of Homer Plessy as hinging on his occupying his correct position in the train carriage. The principal reason why this was so important was because the greatest threat posed by the misrecognised black body was the issue of miscegenation. It is no surprise then that such misrecognitions were a feature of early films, the most famous of them being Edwin S. Porter’s *What Happened in the Tunnel* (1903). In this short film a white woman and her black maid swap seats as the train

²¹ Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*, 108–9.

²² Stewart, 68.

²³ Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982*, The Contemporary United States (London: Macmillan, 1984), 8.

enters a tunnel. A white man seated behind the white woman who had been making advances towards her takes advantage of the darkness to attempt to kiss her and is shocked to discover when the train leaves the tunnel that the black maid has become the unintended object of his manoeuvre. We see the man bury his head in his newspaper as the two women laugh at their subterfuge. This could be read as the two women combining to effectively counter patriarchal power but it could also be viewed as a triangular collusion which ultimately serves to cement such a structure. The lunge forward in the dark shows the white man taking advantage of the opportunity to indulge his sexual desire, while not being seen. The white woman, not wanting to be the object of this puts the maid in her place. This reflects the disavowals that took place around the widespread rape of slaves. It also reveals a fear that the black woman, if not seen correctly (as an illegitimate, even repugnant outlet for sexual desire) presents a threat to the superiority of the white woman. The film is a warning of what can happen if white men fail to recognise the correct object of their sexual desire. Put in its bluntest terms, the film plays with the taboo of darkness: the darkness of the tunnel (a lack of light which hampers vision and leads to dangerous encounters) and the darkness of the black body which is reinforced as that which should not be desired.

Early films also featured a number of scenes in which a black woman was shown bathing a child. One such was Edison's *A Morning Bath* (1896). The charm of the film is meant to reside in the contrast between the whiteness of the soap suds and the blackness of the child (see below).²⁴ It could be suggested that early audiences were meant to find the struggle of the child amusing on the basis that he is worried that the colour of his skin is going to disappear in the suds. Or perhaps the mother is hoping that she can wash away the colour. The threat of this happening could be read as a further play on the guilt and disavowal of the white audience and another warning that sexual desire must be managed and channelled towards the continuation of white supremacy.

²⁴ Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20540 USA, 'A Morning Bath', image, accessed 10 December 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/item/00694249/>.



Figure 5: A black mother is shown giving her struggling child a bath.

Once narrative form in film became more entrenched, the stereotype of black criminality became more marked, to the extent that the criminal act did not even need to be shown. Thievery in particular was shown as a characteristic that was fundamental to blackness. Perpetrators were usually captured and often violently punished by white characters, thus reinforcing the naturalness and need for white supremacy and mastery.²⁵

Before D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* was released then, there was already a well-established cinema which contributed towards the belittlement and marginalisation of the black American. Of course, such degrading stereotypes which populated the films made in Hollywood during this time must have caused damage. Film historian Anna Everett, while acknowledging the popularity of the movie theatre with black audiences, points out the concerns many black thinkers had regarding its content. She highlights the *New York Age*'s reviewer Lester A. Walton who, from as early as 1909, was warning about the damage that films could cause to black people through their ridicule and representations of degeneracy.²⁶ What was more detrimental though, and what gets lost in the analysis of individual films, was the cumulative effect

²⁵ Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*, 73–74.

²⁶ Anna Everett, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909-1949* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2001), 19.

of these roles and the pernicious absence that was a feature of most films during the period. The film analyst James Snead referred to this as a process of omission and spoke of its power: 'It is not true that we don't see what is not on the screen. On the contrary, when the absence is repeated constantly, then we see *that* it is not there. Absence becomes reality.'²⁷ What Snead means by this is twofold: the white viewer is given the message that black people do not matter, they are marginal and dependent; and part of the reason they do not matter is that they are never shown as teachers, doctors, lawyers, or politicians. The 1947 film *Magic Town* is a particularly egregious example of this. In this William Wellman movie, a small American town Grandview is discovered to be absolutely representative of the nation's views, and thus an opinion pollster's dream. What we see when the film transports us to this statistical utopia is that if there are any black Americans, they are so well segregated that they make no visual impact. When black people were shown in movies, as Snead astutely demonstrated, they were placed on the periphery of the screen, cementing the view that they should function similarly in wider society. It was also typical in the 1930s and 1940s for scenes involving black characters to be literally cut out from the version that would be shown in the South.²⁸

Despite this, we can nevertheless imagine how thrilling it must have been for early black cinema audiences to be able to stare at the figures on the screen. We can also envisage, perhaps, how potentially transgressive (and liberating) this experience may have been. bell hooks reminds us that enslaved black people were punished for merely looking and that 'slaves were denied the right to gaze'.²⁹ Usually at risk of violence for looking at white people, the black viewer was suddenly able to watch them unencumbered, to laugh at them making fools of themselves, to look at them with unconcealed desire, even take delight in their pain. Hooks says that 'By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: "Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality."' As well as enabling black people to observe white people – 'you learned to look at white people by staring at them on the screen' – the images from screen and television allowed blacks to see 'white representations of blackness'. 'Black looks', she

²⁷ James A. Snead, *White Screens, Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side*, ed. Colin MacCabe and Cornel West (New York: Routledge, 1994), 147.

²⁸ Snead, 6.

²⁹ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 115.

writes, ‘were interrogating gazes.’ So, these images, which were meant to shut out the black American, could be repurposed as tools, if not for the dismantling of the master’s house, at least for drafting a plan of its design and construction. As hooks states: ‘There is power in looking.’³⁰ Stewart suggests that the idea of the flâneur was something that was denied to the black American: there was only a proscribed freedom to wander the streets and thus the cinema could be employed as a means of experiencing such liberty of movement.³¹

There is evidence of this freedom in the studies that were carried out by Herbert Blumer as part of the Payne Fund Studies in the early 1930s. The Payne Fund Studies is the title for a series of studies examining the effects of the movies on children. These studies grew out of a desire to prove the pernicious effect of the movies. The Rev. William H. Short was convinced that film was bad for the development of the nation’s youngsters and was determined to secure empirical evidence to prove his point. He hoped that if he was able to do this, he would then be in a strong position to demand a federal film censorship body.³² Short set up the Motion Picture Research Council (MPRC) and received financial backing from the Payne Study and Experimental Fund. He recruited the Ohio State University professor W.W. Charters to oversee a research group that came primarily from the social and psychological sciences. The group published twelve studies looking at the effects of movies on children.³³ Psychology professor and editor of the *Hollywood Quarterly*, Franklin Fearing went on to describe this as ‘the first systematic attempt, with the use of experimental and other presumably rigorous techniques, to find out the effects of commercial motion pictures on specific human attitudes and behaviour’.³⁴

Blumer’s contribution was titled *Movies and Conduct* and consisted mainly of the autobiographical accounts of young people and their moviegoing experiences. Blumer

³⁰ hooks, 115–17.

³¹ Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*, 106.

³² Garth Jowett, I. C. Jarvie, and Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy*, Cambridge Studies in the History of Mass Communications (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 29.

³³ Arthur R. Jarvis Jr., ‘The Payne Fund Reports: A Discussion of Their Content, Public Reaction, and Affect on the Motion Picture Industry, 1930-1940.’, *Journal of Popular Culture* 25, no. 2 (1991): 127–40. See also Cressey, ‘The Community: A Social Setting for the Motion Picture’.

³⁴ Franklin Fearing, ‘Influence of the Movies on Attitudes and Behavior’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 254 (1947): 73.

states that the most tangible, but probably not the most significant way that motion pictures influence behaviour is in constituting a template for the play of children.³⁵ More significant, and potentially more dangerous is the authority which comes with the motion picture, the vividness of its images, and the 'emotional possession' this can exert on the viewer. This can lead to the spectator being 'carried away from the usual trend of conduct.'³⁶ Disappointingly for Rev. Short, Blumer produced only limited evidence of the negative effect of cinema and was forced to play down evidence that it had a neutral or even positive impact.³⁷

The study does contain testimony of young viewers being encouraged into stereotypic attitudes towards racial "others", particularly the Chinese. A young woman suggests that it is the films she has seen that have 'establish[ed] a permanent fear of Chinamen in my mind.' Another describes how she 'never passed by our Chinese laundry without increasing my speed ... I have not been able to this day to erase that apprehensive feeling whenever I see a Chinese person, so deep and strong were those early impressions.'³⁸ She does then recognise the impact that the movies have had, even if she does not feel able to overcome them. Other respondents thought themselves more capable of resisting. A young man recognises that the Japanese were being presented to him 'in a very brutal light' but recalls that he had experienced similar feelings when seeing images of Germans that had 'made me actually thirst to spill German blood.' He now says that he stops himself from too quickly jumping to conclusions.³⁹

A number of black people took part in the study and some express discomfort and pain at the way their race is characterised on screen. One young woman thinks that 'every picture picturing a Negro is just to ridicule the race.' She also thinks that the white filmmakers do the same to other races and declares that 'It is very unjust of the white race to make every nation appear inferior compared to them.'⁴⁰ At the same time, there are others who seem able to identify with white film stars without finding their

³⁵ Herbert. Blumer, *Movies and Conduct*, Motion Pictures and Youth. Payne Fund Studies. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 13.

³⁶ Blumer, 74.

³⁷ Jowett, Jarvie, and Fuller-Seeley, *Children and the Movies*, 79.

³⁸ Blumer, *Movies and Conduct*, 145.

³⁹ Blumer, 144.

⁴⁰ Blumer, 146.

colour an insurmountable barrier. One high-school senior tells of using Clara Bow as a particular role model;⁴¹ another says that she uses what she sees on the screen as material for making out at parties and there is no indication that she is not able to identify with the white characters on screen.⁴² Also, a white college junior describes in vivid detail having to leave the cinema at a very young age such was his identification with a 'Negro slave cowered before his master, who was reaching for his whip.'⁴³ *The Birth of a Nation* is referenced as a film which can elicit opposing views to its meaning and impact on the viewer. A white college senior describes how the film allowed her to 'see the Negro of the South as he was and not as the Northerners have always portrayed him.' Absorbing fully the message that Griffith wanted to deliver, she concludes that 'It is only when a Negro demands the marriage of the abolitionist's daughter, who is white, that he, the father, can realize what all his agitation has meant.' But another viewer – described as 'Female, 20, white, Jewish, college sophomore' – says that the film brought about her 'first feeling of rebellion over a racial question. I remember coming home and crying because the poor colored people were so mistreated.'⁴⁴

We see here how we are at liberty when watching a film to identify with anyone on the screen, and this might not match up with our own identifying features of race, gender, or sexuality. The cinema permits, in the words of James Snead, 'an almost polymorphic perverse oscillation between possible roles, creating a radically broadened freedom of identification.' However, this freedom comes at a cost because it 'only increases the guilt that comes from looking at that which should remain hidden.'⁴⁵ Hooks stresses how those in power have always appreciated the importance of the image in maintaining control: 'From slavery on, white supremacists have recognised that control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination.'⁴⁶ Stuart Hall characterises this as:

an arena that is *profoundly* mythic. It is a theatre of popular desires, a theatre of popular fantasies. It is where we discover and play with the identifications of

⁴¹ Blumer, 36.

⁴² Blumer, 50.

⁴³ Blumer, 76.

⁴⁴ Blumer, 180–81.

⁴⁵ Snead, *White Screens, Black Images*, 23.

⁴⁶ hooks, *Black Looks*, 2.

ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message, but to ourselves for the first time.⁴⁷

What is crucial to highlight here, in terms of discovery, play, identification, and imagination, is the impact of reception. The white viewer might only subconsciously recognise the black screen character; the familiar stereotype allows them to concentrate on the white stars. But, in all likelihood, the perceptive black viewer, more alert to the peripheral, can garner valuable information about visual power and control. The reception of the film will, at least in part, be a function of the arena in which it is received. A movie premiere, for example, creates a different dynamic than when the same film is viewed as part of a film study group. For those who have worried about the impact of cinema, the audience has often been regarded as at least as problematic as the films they watched. The interplay of screen and audience and the effects it might produce outside of the theatre has rarely been more publicised and debated than when *The Birth of a Nation* was released in 1915.

The Birth of a Nation

The Birth of a Nation received its public premiere at Clune's Auditorium in Los Angeles on 8 February 1915. All 2,500 tickets had been sold at record prices and there was a huge sense of occasion, with the audience being led to their seats by usherettes in Civil War outfits.⁴⁸ There was a full orchestra playing a score created for the film that was Wagnerian in its drive, particularly in the battle scenes. Richard Schickel described it thus:

It seems fair to say that literally millions of people first experienced the full, and really quite magical, transporting powers of motion pictures at this movie, that many had a conversion experience ... in the end one suspects that the film owed far more of its uncanny power at the box office to Griffith's demonstration of his – and the medium's – gift for making powerful emotional connections with audiences than it did to Thomas Dixon's perverse message. That many accepted the truth of that message unquestioningly ... says a great deal about the state of racial consciousness in this country at this time, but that acceptance also says

⁴⁷ Stuart Hall, 'What Is This "Black" in Black Popular Culture?', *Social Justice* 20, no. 1/2 (51–52) (1993): 132.

⁴⁸ Stokes, D. W. *Griffith's The Birth of a Nation*, 15.

something about the state of the nation's movie consciousness at the time, too, the fundamental lack of knowledge about the medium's power.⁴⁹

Although the frenzied nature of the reaction to the film was probably unprecedented, its spectacular scale was Griffith's attempt to respond to the foreign-made epics which had proved hugely popular in the previous few years. One of the most lavish of these was Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914), an epic tale set in Ancient Rome with elaborate settings and costumes. There was a great sense of occasion around its screening. In Pittsburgh for example, the *Pittsburgh Press* related how the new Miles Theatre would screen it with 'the great \$40,000 Wurlitzer Hope-Jones unit orchestra and pipe organ' along with 'the entire Pittsburgh Male chorus of 167 voices.'⁵⁰ Before that in 1913, Enrico Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis?* had elicited similar responses. Welcoming its arrival in Buffalo, The *Buffalo Times* anticipated 'the most magnificent photoplay of the century', claiming that it had 'educational value, historical accuracy and unsurpassed brilliancy of color and action.'⁵¹ It is also something of an exaggeration to say that there was a 'fundamental lack of knowledge about the medium's power.' The year 1915 saw the publication of Vachel Lindsay's *The Art of the Moving Picture*, and the previous year saw the establishment of the National Committee for Better Films. This was part of an initiative by the National Board of Review, intended to discourage censorship, and its aim was to encourage films that were suitable for families; nevertheless its formation is just one illustration that there was a growing, albeit inchoate, awareness of the potential of cinema to influence an audience.⁵²

The year of release of the film is significant: 1915 marked 50 years since the end of the Civil War. Griffith's film was not a racist outlier, but the cinematic arm of a revisionist history written by what was known as the "Dunning School". Claiming historiographical support for the story's message and politics was relatively uncontroversial at the time. The period of Reconstruction after the end of the Civil War and the freeing of the slaves was regarded by many southerners as 'the "tragic

⁴⁹ Richard Schickel, *D.W. Griffith: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 279.

⁵⁰ 'The Story of D'Annunzio's "Cabiria"', *The Pittsburgh Press*, 25 April 1915, 32.

⁵¹ 'Drama: Academy, "Quo Vadis"', *The Buffalo Sunday Times*, 27 July 1913, 38.

⁵² Noel Brown, 'Hollywood, the Family Audience and the Family Film, 1930-2010' (Newcastle, Newcastle University, 2010), 55, <https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.1805.1363>.

era” of Negro misrule.⁵³ Glenda Gilmore, a historian of the American South, well describes how William Archibald Dunning, who taught history at Columbia University, was successful in spreading this prejudice as a historical fact. Dunning argued that ‘the Civil War had been a tragic misunderstanding and that Reconstruction had been a scurrilous punishment foisted upon helpless white Southerners by arrogant Yankees who exploited African Americans by giving them citizenship rights.’⁵⁴ At the time the film was released, the Dunning School was at the height of its considerable influence. Just as the film shows black freedmen to desire nothing more than white women, this was also the historical view offered by Dunning himself:

A more intimate association with the other race than that which business and politics involved was the end toward which the ambition of the blacks tended consciously or unconsciously to direct itself. The manifestations of this ambition were infinite on their diversity. It played a part in the demand for mixed schools, in the legislative prohibition of discrimination between the races in hotels and theaters, and even in the hideous crime against white womanhood which now assumed new meaning in the annals of outrage.⁵⁵

In his introduction to a book on Dunning and his followers, John David Smith highlights the mutual dependence of the School and fictional representations of the story it propagated. He describes how it dominated the popular understanding of Reconstruction thanks to its dissemination in *The Birth of a Nation*, Claude G. Bowers’s *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln* (1929), George Fort Milton’s *The Age of Hate: Andrew Johnson and the Radicals* (1930), and Margaret Mitchell’s novel *Gone with the Wind* (1936) and the film of the same title that appeared three years later.⁵⁶ It was Bowers’s account that led to W.E.B. Du Bois researching and writing *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935) after obtaining funding from the Julius Rosenwald Fund.⁵⁷ Du Bois’s

⁵³ William Archibald Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic: 1865–1877* (New York; London: Harper & Brothers, 1907), 1. Dunning historicises Reconstruction as beginning with the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865 but his, and Griffith’s, objections were really with the period of Radical Reconstruction beginning in 1867 with Congress passing the Reconstruction Act, requiring Southern states to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment.

⁵⁴ Glenda Gilmore, ‘Which Southerners? Which Southern Historians? A Century of Southern History at Yale’, *Yale Review* 99, no. 1 (January 2011): 60.

⁵⁵ Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic: 1865–1877*, 214.

⁵⁶ John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery, eds., *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013).

⁵⁷ W.E.B Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880*. (Oxford University Press, 2014).

account of Reconstruction would eventually come to be accepted as the more accurate. Du Bois recorded how white plantation owners had deliberately stoked racial antipathies so that their own control of Southern agriculture was maintained. This false narrative of white supremacy and black profligacy had been created and maintained by a combination of history, politics, literature, theatre, and cinema. This demonstrates the sometimes deliberate, often unconscious, strategies that were used to assert white power and outlaw miscegenation.

It is significant that the creation of the word *miscegenation* was a product of the Civil War. Fittingly, it entered the language as part of a hoax designed to scare white Americans out of voting for Abraham Lincoln in the 1864 presidential election, which was effectively a national referendum on the Emancipation Proclamation. Two journalists on the New York *World*, David Goodman Croly and George Wakeman, invented the word out of the root words *miscere*, to mix, and *genus*, race. The previous word for the concept had been the far more positive sounding *amalgamation*. The two men produced a 72-page pamphlet *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races Applied to the American White Man and the Negro*, distributed anonymously.⁵⁸ The publication was an overheated attempt to dissuade people from voting for Lincoln because he was going to encourage the marriage of black men to white women. But the actual prospect of interracial marriage was so slim in most places that its impact on the election was negligible.⁵⁹ However, the word itself did take a hold, to the extent that many Democrats began referring to the Emancipation Proclamation as the Miscegenation Proclamation.⁶⁰

Griffith's film was an adaptation of Thomas Dixon Jr.'s 1902 Reconstruction novel *The Leopard's Spots* and his 1905 novel *The Clansman*, which had several characters clearly derived from the earlier story. The two stories were quickly merged into a play, also called *The Clansman*, which was an immediate hit but did attract controversy and calls for boycotts.⁶¹ Dixon was keen to collaborate with Griffith and declared that one of his main reasons for doing so was to help 'prevent the mixing of white and negro

⁵⁸ Forrest G Wood, *Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 54–55.

⁵⁹ Wood, 74.

⁶⁰ Elise Lemire, *Miscegenation: Making Race in America*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 117.

⁶¹ Stokes, D. W. *Griffith's The Birth of a Nation*, 54–58.

blood by intermarriage.⁶² That the film version should arouse strong sentiments then, was not a surprise; but the intensity and persistence of them was of a different order. Linda Williams persuasively argues that the film had a conversion effect on the audience: ‘To be a white American who saw ... [the film] was to be converted both to the power of a previously slighted medium and, through that power, to new kinds of racial feeling.’⁶³ The result of this was to bring together North and South, crystallising ‘the black man into an object of white fear and loathing.’⁶⁴ The cultural scholar Mason Stokes argues that when Lillian Gish, playing the role of Elsie, is rescued at the end of the film, it is also the audience that is being rescued: ‘that crowd of white folks shut up in a dark room with what appear to be thousands of excited, jumpy and dangerously absurd black folks.’⁶⁵ The NAACP had to infiltrate the film with light-skinned members since black viewers were generally unable to attend screenings. Schickel reports that some black members who did manage to see the film found themselves reluctantly swept along by the experience. Karl Brown, a camera assistant on the production, describes seeing the film and just about every member of the audience being on their feet and cheering during the most rousing scenes: ‘every soul in that audience was in the saddle with the clansmen and pounding hell-for-leather on an errand of stern justice, lighted on their way by the holy flames of a burning cross.’⁶⁶

One of the most vivid accounts of witnessing the film was from reviewer Ward Greene, fresh from seeing the movie at the Atlanta Theatre in December 1915. He described it as coming to the viewer ‘as the soul and the spirit and the flesh of the heart of your country’s history, ripped from the past and brought quivering with all human emotions before your eyes.’⁶⁷ He suggested that any man who picked fault with its

⁶² Cedric J. Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 104.

⁶³ Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 98.

⁶⁴ Williams, 99.

⁶⁵ Mason Boyd Stokes, *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy*, New Americanists (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 161.

⁶⁶ Scott Simmon, *The Films of D.W. Griffith*, Cambridge Film Classics (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 104–5.

⁶⁷ Robert Lang, ed., *The Birth of a Nation: D.W. Griffith, Director*, Rutgers Films in Print, v. 21 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 179.

racial politics must be ‘too picayunish and warped for words’ and that it would amount to ‘a gnat’s sting of criticism.’⁶⁸

To Greene’s declared chagrin, there were plenty of people sufficiently picayune and warped to object to the film and it met with protests throughout the country. Indeed, the organisational efforts in putting together protests was instrumental in the development of the NAACP. Boston, Massachusetts saw sustained, well-attended protests. One of the protestors, Joseph C. Manning, drew attention to the hypocrisy of the film:

‘This play shows a negro chasing a white girl,’ he said, ‘but I can go to Montgomery, Alabama, tomorrow and find 300 white men chasing colored girls and they will not be prosecuted by the law. These pictures are part of a propaganda to destroy the spirit of liberty in the North and to enable the old slave oligarchy to dominate in the Nation once more.’⁶⁹

But the film could be viewed in different ways. The author Paul Goodman in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* describes how when he watched the film in 1961 with James Baldwin, the two of them were convinced that Gus had no intention of raping Flora, that it was ‘because of her own disturbed fantasy that the white girl destroys herself.’⁷⁰ In his similar reading Russell Merritt states that if this were the case, then the film amounts to an exposure of how the Ku Klux Klan kills innocent men on trumped up charges of rape and in this instance that is a white man in blackface.⁷¹ As Merritt goes on to outline, Gus is ‘tried and executed, we are told, for a crime – a rape – we have seen he did not commit.’⁷²

Merritt himself goes further with this line of thought, highlighting the ways in which cinema can play deftly with our sense of taboo. In a later chapter I consider a scene from *Pinky* in which there is a dizzying effect when we uncover the layers of disguise and disavowal taking place in a cross-racial kiss between two white actors. There is a similar unsettling swirl in the chase of Flora. As Merritt puts it: ‘A white actor pretends

⁶⁸ Lang, 179.

⁶⁹ ‘Colored People to Storm State House’, *The Boston Daily Globe*, 19 April 1915, 3.

⁷⁰ Paul Goodman, ‘Was It Attempted Rape?’, *New York Times*, 28 February 1965, 293.

⁷¹ Russell Merritt, ‘D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*: Going After Little Sister’, in *Close Viewings: An Anthology of New Film Criticism*, ed. Peter Lehman (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1990), 228.

⁷² Merritt, 235.

to be a black man pretending to want only to talk with an actress who pretends to be a frightened girl who is so young and innocent she may or may not know what he really wants or doesn't want.⁷³ On a more purely visceral level, the film, most pointedly in its climactic chase sequences, is visually and narratively powerful. As Melvyn Stokes suggests, because the black viewers of the movie may have been able to distance themselves from the earlier events portrayed, this may have allowed them to enjoy what they saw as no more than a spectacle. The fact that it was white actors playing the villainous roles also might have worked to generate such a distance.⁷⁴ Stokes also makes the acute observation that many of the marginalised black Americans viewing the film in 1915 would have looked admiringly at their fictionalised ancestors taking key roles in the state legislature and judiciary and fighting back forcefully against white oppression.⁷⁵ It is also worth considering that because the “message” of the film was so obvious, it may have been easier to resist. As Elmer Davis would go on to say in his role as the head of the US Office of War Information in 1943: ‘the easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people’s minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized’.⁷⁶ Or, as the influential Hollywood producer put it: ‘At no time can you feed to the American hammer-hammer propaganda ... Any "truths" you wish to impart, with and in the drama, had better be skilfully integrated.’⁷⁷

Thomas Dixon, in contrast, hoped that the audience would be involved in a visceral, even violent way. He declared: ‘By this device we can reach them. We can make them see things happen before their eyes until they cry in anguish. We can teach them the true living history of the race. Its scenes will be true living realities, not cold works on printed pages, but scenes wet with tears and winged with hope.’⁷⁸ If Dixon emphasised

⁷³ Merritt, 235. Even more bizarrely, but in similar ways, we experience the vertigo of the title when, in Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, Scottie finally holds Maddie/Judy/Carlotta in his arms. Both/all of the participants cross between life and death, as persons and ghosts.

⁷⁴ Stokes, *D. W. Griffith’s The Birth of a Nation*, 224.

⁷⁵ Stokes, 225.

⁷⁶ Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, ‘What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942–1945’, *The Journal of American History* 64, no. 1 (1977): 88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1888275>.

⁷⁷ Walter Wanger, ‘OWI and Motion Pictures’, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (20 March 1943): 104, <https://doi.org/10.1086/265600>.

⁷⁸ Gerald R. Butters, *Black Manhood on the Silent Screen*, Culture America (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 66.

the emotional pull that film could exert on its audience, Griffith was keen to advertise its claims as an educational aid. He envisioned schoolchildren being taught history using films such as his, and even imagined a new kind of public library, not hugely dissimilar from today's world wide web, in which there is:

a long row of boxes or pillars, properly classified and indexed, of course. At each box a push button, and before each box a seat. Suppose you wish to "read up" on a certain episode in Napoleon's life. Instead of consulting all the authorities, wading through a host of books, and ending bewildered ... confused at every point by conflicting opinions about what did happen, you will merely seat yourself at a properly adjusted window ... press the button and actually see what happened.⁷⁹

Such noble hopes for the reach of film are shattered when watching Griffith's attempt to render this history. What dominates it from the outset is the same obsession as that which prevented Dunning and his acolytes from providing a representative account of Reconstruction: the conviction that black people were determined to have sex with whites and that if they did it would be disastrous for the future of white supremacy. It is this overwhelming prejudice, and the hindered vision it commands, that result in the imaginative straitjacket which ultimately prevents Griffith's film from being regarded today as the majestic film it was once seen as indisputably being.

Jack Johnson

This anti-miscegenationist preoccupation was reflective of the milieu to which Griffith addressed his message. It was a fixation which had been strengthened by the publicity commanded by the black world heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson over the previous decade. It is ironic that Johnson should have finally been beaten by a white challenger shortly after the release of Griffith's film as it is easy to see scenes in the movie which seem to have been made to offer white audiences relief from Johnson's reign. They picture to an excessive degree the almost supernatural strength of the white man in comparison to the black. Most pointedly, the scene of the town's white blacksmith fighting and beating at least six black men in the local saloon. He even throws some of them out of the window and is only stopped when someone else in the saloon shoots him in the back. Importantly, all of this film violence was released by the alleged attempted rape of the white girl Flora by the black renegade Gus. The rest of

⁷⁹ 'Movies as Yet Only in Swaddling Clothes', *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, 11 April 1915.

the film is a protracted fight to avenge this act and to curtail black freedom and mobility so that white women can be correctly placed and recognised as the property of white men.

Johnson's reign as world champion had occurred at the same time as the cinema became established as the nation's most popular medium. As the scholar of African American history, Theresa Runstedtler writes, 'Johnson had emerged as the world's first black movie star, and his fight films became the period's most widely disseminated representations of black male dominance.'⁸⁰ His appeal was worldwide and to see black people united in celebrating each punch that Johnson landed and then reliving his fights outside of the cinema was a direct challenge to white hegemony. This was all the more so given what we have already shown: that the cinema was being used as part of a much 'broader universe of white supremacist entertainments' of which boxing was supposed to be another component.⁸¹ What made the situation still more unbearable for many white viewers was the fact that Johnson had well-publicised sexual relationships with several white women. The *Police Gazette* referred to Johnson as 'the vilest, most despicable creature that lives.'⁸² Johnson played up to this, always dressing well and relished having white servants to help him prepare.⁸³ What perhaps made the films of Johnson's fights even more toxic was the number of women in the audience. They made up a significant proportion of the audience and not only were they 'being introduced to the sight of semi-naked, large, fit men on film' they were also seeing undermined 'established perceptions of racial hierarchy by having a black man defeat an opponent who was white.'⁸⁴

Of all Johnson's victories, the most painful to bear for the white majority was his defeat of Jim Jeffries on 4 July 1910. Jeffries had been built up, despite being out of shape and with a far less impressive record than Johnson, as the white man who would prove the racial superiority of his fellow white Americans. Jeffries relished the role and declared in his final statement before stepping into the ring that: 'I realize full well

⁸⁰ Theresa Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line*, American Crossroads 33 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 95.

⁸¹ Runstedtler, 47.

⁸² Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 123.

⁸³ Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner*, 40.

⁸⁴ Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation*, 219.

just what depends on me, and I am not going to disappoint the public.’ Making clear that he is representing the ‘portion of the white race that has been looking to me to defend its athletic superiority’, he assures them that ‘I am fit to do my very best.’⁸⁵ On the same page of the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, H.E.K.’s preview of the fight summarises it as being one where the ‘great question of whether white or black shall reign soon to be answered.’ The author goes on to describe how Johnson had amused himself that morning by setting up a fake “kangaroo trial” for his entourage. Johnson played judge and accused his camp of flirting with white women and stealing chickens. H.E.K. states that Johnson ‘likes to play judge just like a 10-year-old colored girl likes to play teacher and he is just as childlike about it.’⁸⁶ Elsewhere on the page former champion James J. Corbett predicts that Jeffries will ‘prove the physical superiority of the white man’ and compares the two fighters to animals, with Jeffries the brave lion to Johnson’s wily wolf: the latter tough but biologically inferior to the king of the jungle.⁸⁷ Once the two men commenced fighting it was obvious that Johnson was the better, stronger, fitter fighter and he toyed with Jeffries for much of the bout before ending it in the fifteenth round. The expectant white audience had built themselves up to see what they wanted to see – Jeffries as the embodiment of white male superiority, Johnson as the childish pretender – and had failed to see what had always been in front of their eyes: a champion at the height of his powers taking on a clearly inferior opponent.

By the time that Johnson fought the latest “Great White Hope” in 1912, a group of Representatives introduced bills in both the House and the Senate which sought to head off the possibility of the screening of another white defeat. They urged that fight films should be prohibited from travelling between states. One of the Representatives, Seaborn A. Rodenberry of Georgia referred to Johnson as ‘an African biped beast’ and ventured that ‘no man descended from the old Saxon race can look upon that kind of contest without abhorrence and disgust.’⁸⁸ Rodenberry revealingly also went on to describe intermarriage as an ‘embryonic cancer’ representing the most ‘voracious

⁸⁵ ‘The White Man’s Real Hope Is That the Better Man Is Not Cheated’, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 July 1910, 10.

⁸⁶ H.E.K., ‘Fighters Await Tap of the Gong’, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 July 1910, 10.

⁸⁷ James J. Corbett, ‘Jeff Sure to Win, Says J.J. Corbett’, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 July 1910, 10.

⁸⁸ Susan Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation: Spectacular Narratives of Gender and Race, 1903–1967* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 53.

parasite [to have] ever sucked at the heart of pure society and moral status'.⁸⁹ The resulting legislation arising out of these debates was the Sims Act passed into law on 31 July 1912. As well as preventing moving images of Johnson's victories crossing state borders, the act also encouraged cinema to be thought of as another form of commerce.⁹⁰ Restricting the transportation of celluloid across the border, rather than curtailing its exhibition, meant treating the films as inflammatory physical material in both a literal and metaphoric sense.

This prevented the films of Johnson's victories being shown but it was the earlier Mann Act, signed into law by President Taft on 25 June 1910 that led to the arrest of Johnson himself in 1912. The Mann Act had been led through the House committees by Representative James Mann as a response to burgeoning concerns over the so-called "white slave" trade, the trafficking of women for sex; Mann declared that 'the white slave traffic, while not so extensive, is much more horrible than any black slave traffic ever was in the history of the world'.⁹¹ This had been fanned by sensational press coverage, which had already led to the formation of the forerunner of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Bureau of Investigation, created as a federal response to ensure the safety of white women. Ethnic and racial "others" were clearly identified as the threat and the Bureau's role was to monitor and police them. It thus became a felony to knowingly transport a woman across state lines for the purpose of "debauchery" or any other "immoral purposes". Lee Grieveson describes the legislation as based on 'a narrative of innocent white women abducted into sexual slavery primarily by immigrants'.⁹² It fused the supposed immorality of ethnic others with the stereotype of dangerous internal "foreigners", specifically African American men and the myth of the rapacious black man. Jack Johnson became a high-profile victim of the Act in 1912 when transporting his future wife across state borders. She was unwilling to offer any evidence, but the Bureau of Investigation extended their search

⁸⁹ 'Denounces Legal Uniting of Races', *Chicago Tribune*, 12 December 1912, 9.

⁹⁰ Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*, 8. This would be further enshrined in the 1915 ruling *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio* famously classing motion picture exhibition as 'a business, pure and simple, originated and conducted for profit.' For a good recent account of attempts to control and censor early movies in America see Jennifer Fronc, *Monitoring the Movies: The Fight over Film Censorship in Early Twentieth-Century Urban America*, First edition (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2017).

⁹¹ Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*, 138.

⁹² Grieveson, 138.

for previous liaisons and found another white woman who was prepared to admit to crossing state lines in order to meet Johnson for immoral purposes. Johnson was tried in May 1913 and sentenced to a year and a day in the Illinois State Penitentiary.⁹³

Grieverson describes how this entire process amounted to a regulation of the movement of the filmed record of his fights and then the actual body of Johnson himself. He argues that this ‘was fundamentally racist, designed to shore up a fragile “colour line” by policing images of an assertive black masculinity, by policing bodies and celebrity and, through this, of disempowered and thus potentially “ungovernable” populations.’⁹⁴ The effect of this was also to intensify the regulation of cinema, right up to the federal level. He contends that these concerns reflected fears that mass culture was threatening local norms and cultural histories. States who wished to see the filmed representation of Jack Johnson’s successes in the ring as little as they wanted to see Johnson himself in their locality, looked to government for regulation that would assist state control over the movement of both. As the states’ follow-up to the legislation taken federally, censorship boards were set up locally – Ohio, Pennsylvania, Kansas, and Maryland all had boards operating by 1916 – and were predicated on the duty of states to ‘protect the health, morals, and safety of their citizens.’⁹⁵ These states were taking measures to police their borders and to act as a moral board of health.

Grieverson demonstrates how these various dialogues, which were ostensibly about protecting public health and decency, were in fact motivated by a determination to enforce the racial status quo. The opening up of borders, and the easier travel and communication channels available to traverse them, provoked fears of strangers and itinerants. Legislation which was specifically targeted at ‘the regulation of the movement of images, was inextricably tied to a regulation of the movement of black bodies through social space and of troublesome population groups.’⁹⁶ As this expanded to federal levels of control, the content made for, and then permitted on, cinema screens became ever more imbricated within national ideology.

⁹³ Grieverson, 140.

⁹⁴ Grieverson, 124.

⁹⁵ Grieverson, 147.

⁹⁶ Grieverson, 149.

A Dearth of Imagination

This was the context for the release of Griffith's movie which clearly set out its own version of a national ideology. The film suggested that the birth of the nation had taken place as a result of the reaction of white Americans to the realities of black freedoms under Radical Reconstruction from 1867. It was a birth which was based on a belief in white supremacy and the urgency of the prohibition of miscegenation. In order to show this in as compelling and convincing a way as possible, Griffith played with extreme stereotypes and reductive characterisations, particularly with the use of blackface. This was used for all characters that had any kind of role in the film above that of an extra. It led to an obsessive need to show white women as virtuous, fragile, and in need of male protection. They were contrasted to black women as desexualised 'mammy' figures whose primary desire is to serve master and mistress. More so still they were contrasted to the mulatto, whose insatiable sexual desire makes them a figure of horror. The black man was portrayed as being consumed by desire for the white woman and capable of violence or manipulative dissembling in order to obtain his goal. The clash that is created by these two character types – the innocent white woman and the rapacious black male - opened up the space which the white man was destined to fulfil in order to maintain the balance of the nation: that is, the protector of white womanhood. This necessitated lynching the black body at the slightest provocation, both to punish the alleged perpetrator but also to discourage any chance of reciprocal feelings ever being aroused in the white woman.

Importantly, the whole plot of the film is based around the image of the mulatto and the attempts of two of them – one male and one female – to inveigle themselves into white society. I emphasise this to argue that the overriding message of the film is that the mulatto is particularly dangerous because we cannot always see them for what they really are – which was for the film and for the social order it represented, a Negro. It is imperative then, for both Griffith and Dixon, that the combined constraints of segregation and barriers towards miscegenation will make surveillance and punishment more effective. In terms of the film, order is restored when the two mulattoes are ousted from white society. Both are intent on having sex with white partners and it is this possibility which must be curtailed in order for the nation to be born as one in which the mulatto can be excised. The word *mulatto* itself is derived from the Spanish word for mule, the very term then seeming to demand that it be a sterile

body. This anti-miscegenationist aspect of the film is key to Griffith's intentions in making the film and perhaps shows why it was logical to have Walter Long in blackface to play the role of Gus. This recognised, without drawing direct attention to, the fact that the main reason there were so many mulattoes in areas of the South was because of the widespread coercion and rape carried out by white owners and their families on their black slaves. The film is a paean to segregation, the chief priority of which is to ensure that whiteness is visually assured and then proliferated through marriages that improve and purify the race. The marriages in *The Birth of a Nation* are between families who know each other's history and good-standing. This is the conservative direction of the film: that because the blight of miscegenation has led to uncertain racial identity, embodied in the monstrosity of the manipulating mulatto, a closed mind is called for.

If the film's message is conservative and reactionary, its delivery - particularly in its use of parallel editing - is the opposite. During its second half it is feverish, incessant, and at times overwhelming. Its intense and spectacular narrative must have been one of the reasons that some black viewers could not help but get carried along by it. Also, as Melvyn Stokes suggests, what we actually see on the screen – through white actors in blackface playing up to stereotypes white people had created around a mythic black figure – is a white man's projection of black people. Perhaps they even took some delight in such identification. After all, as Stokes highlights, they are shown with a degree of political power unimaginable in 1915 and with guns in their hands fighting white power.⁹⁷ There surely were such viewers but there were many others who were incensed by the film. Black actor William Walker saw the film upon its release and recalled leaving the theatre feeling like 'killing all the white people in the world.'⁹⁸ The NAACP was the most prominent of several organisations which organised protests against the film and during 1915 its membership swelled from 5,000 to almost 10,000.⁹⁹ But this has to be balanced against the publicity they actually provided for the film. There were those who thought that the best strategy was to ignore the film and many black people would have done this, not out of a sense of strategic withdrawal, but because they had more urgent issues to worry about.

⁹⁷ Stokes, D. W. *Griffith's The Birth of a Nation*, 224–25.

⁹⁸ Stokes, 223.

⁹⁹ Stokes, 169.

The film has provoked perennial controversy and Griffith's recognition as a director has ebbed and flowed. As late as 1958 the respected critic James Agee declared that 'To watch his work is like being the witness to ... the birth of an art'. Even in 2000, film historian Anne Everett would say that 'this classic, problematic film narrative of racial intolerance will be shown and celebrated for generations to come.' Twenty years later, the film is rarely screened but did feature in Spike Lee's recent *BlacKkKlansman* (2018). But here it was shown as a film associated purely with the Ku Klux Klan. Using the kind of parallel editing that made Griffith's film such a visceral experience for his audiences (with the Klan shown riding to the rescue while also seeing white women threatened with rape), Lee used it to contrast the hateful audience of the original film with the good people mourning the deaths of those who suffered from its consequences.

The anti-miscegenationist drive which propelled the original film is the ultimate reason why it is likely to become remembered more as a cultural embarrassment than as a cinematic landmark. The crunched hatefulness of the imagery cannot be simply divorced from its craft and artfulness. It is flawed precisely because of the lack of imagination which led to Griffith making such crass and reductive characterisations of key characters. The film is now discomfiting because of the redundancy of its stereotypes; and the latter cannot be separated out as unfortunate features of an otherwise brilliant production. They do constrict Griffith's vision, lead to him painting unrealistic and ugly scenes, and failing to break out of a highly restricted and claustrophobic worldview.

Interwar Research and Representation

Anti-racists were determined to challenge the film in some way upon its release, and in its immediate aftermath: a film with a counter-narrative would have been an obvious response. One such venture was begun by Carl Laemmle's Universal Film Manufacturing Company, who approached the NAACP and did some work together on a scenario provisionally known as *Lincoln's Dream*.¹⁰⁰ The film was eventually released in 1918 under the title *The Birth of a Race*. A *Variety* reviewer referred to it as 'the most grotesque cinema chimera in the history of the picture business' and correctly forecast its quick demise.¹⁰¹ But there were other releases which, while not as direct a

¹⁰⁰ Stokes, 163–67.

¹⁰¹ 'Moving Pictures: The Birth of a Race', *Variety*, December 1918, 38.

response to Griffith's film, were, according to Jane Gaines 'inextricably tied' to its release: 'Griffith's offensive epic was the irritant around which a pearl formed.'¹⁰² One film which offered a notable riposte to Griffith's was Oscar Micheaux's *Within Our Gates* (1920). The title was an echo of one of the lines from *The Birth of a Nation* advising that black people should remain within their gates.¹⁰³ Others that have been claimed as growing out of a desire to counter Griffith's film include *The Realization of a Negro's Ambition* (1917), *The Colored American Winning His Suit* (1917), and *Heroic Negro Soldiers of the World War* (1919).¹⁰⁴ Such films, and particularly the influence of Micheaux and the Lincoln Motion Picture Company did lead to the 'first measurable black efforts to challenge the white monopoly over the art of the cinema.'¹⁰⁵ For white cinemagoers though, the main effect of Griffith's film was to seed a reluctance to tackle racial issues through film. Black actors did still appear as criminals, but they were more likely to appear as servants and maids. More likely still, they would not appear at all. The way in which black actors could be involved in storylines was formally circumscribed in guidance produced in 1927 as part of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America's (MPPDA) "Don'ts and Be Carefuls". The advice was to never depict scenes which could be interpreted as miscegenation. This was repeated in the Production Code formulation known as the "Hays Code" in 1930.¹⁰⁶

This picture of marginalisation is complicated by the advent of sound into cinema in 1927, famously and somewhat ironically marked by Al Jolson, a Jewish performer in blackface singing "Mammy". The black communist film writer Harry A. Potamkin writing in *Close Up* in 1929 contended that 'Sound has made the negro the "big thing" of the film moment'.¹⁰⁷ Writing in the same edition, Geraldyn Dismond was effusive about the new opportunities offered to black actors by the introduction of sound,

¹⁰² Jane Gaines, *Fire and Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 6.

¹⁰³ Micheaux was one of the most successful Black American filmmakers and left a rich body of work offering valuable comment on racism in twentieth-century America. However, this study is one which is primarily concerned with how film was used to help manipulate white viewers into a false and incoherent view of black people and his work is reluctantly passed over. For an excellent analysis of his film in light of Griffith's epic see Gaines, *Fire and Desire*.

¹⁰⁴ Stokes, D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, 339.

¹⁰⁵ Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*, 71.

¹⁰⁶ Stokes, D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Harry Alan Potamkin, 'The Aframerican Cinema', in *Close up: 1927-1933; Cinema and Modernism*, ed. James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (London: Cassell, 1998), 65.

picking out forthcoming productions of *Show Boat* (1929) and John Ford's *Strong Boy* (1929) as positive developments. She claimed that 'the Negro movie actor ... under proper direction and sympathetic treatment can easily become a potent factor in our great struggle for better race relations'.¹⁰⁸ The year of this special issue also saw the release of King Vidor's *Hallelujah* (1929), with an all-black cast and described by the *New York Times*'s Mordaunt Hall as 'A Negro Talking Picture'. The review is positive but speaks of the audience being 'much amused by the scenes dealing with the baptism of the darkies', containing a host of 'white-clad hallelujah-raving blacks'.¹⁰⁹ The optimism of Potamkin and Dismond was not fulfilled; rather sound offered an opportunity for black actors to take roles as entertainers in sections that could be easily edited if it was felt that Southern audiences might be offended.

The Birth of a Nation was a relatively constant feature on the nation's screens throughout the interwar years. It was still reaching some theatres and communities where it had not previously been seen in 1926.¹¹⁰ Whenever it went through another incarnation it raised fresh protests, such as when it was given a revival in 1921. In 1930 it returned to the screen with sound accompaniment.¹¹¹ Two of the social scientists who were part of the Payne Fund Studies, Ruth Peterson and Louis Thurstone, used this as an opportunity to test how damaging the film might be for the propagation of negative attitudes towards black Americans. This was one of a series of such tests; others centred around attitudes towards crime, bankers, Chinese people, war, and gambling. They chose for their study the town of Crystal Lake, Illinois, with a population of 3,700 people, among whom there was no black representation. Attitudinal tests were carried out on 434 students in grades six to twelve of the town's schools. The test was conducted one week prior to the children attending a screening of the film and revealed a mean score of 7.41 where 0 showed the most negative attitude towards black people and 10 the most positive. When the same test was carried out on the same students on the day after they had seen the film, the mean score came down to 5.93. The authors carried out a range of tests on how various types of film affected

¹⁰⁸ Dorothy Richardson, 'Continuous Performance', in *Close up: 1927-1933 ; Cinema and Modernism*, ed. James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (London: Cassell, 1998), 75–76.

¹⁰⁹ Mordaunt Hall, 'A Negro Talking Picture', *New York Times*, 21 August 1929, 33.

¹¹⁰ Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation*, 241.

¹¹¹ Stokes, 9.

attitudes to the events portrayed in the films and concluded that this was ‘the largest effect found in any of the experiments we conducted.’¹¹² Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly, the authors returned to Crystal Lake five months later to carry out the same test. They found that there had been a partial return to the more positive attitudes but with a mean of 6.51 there was still a meaningful difference between the two scores.¹¹³ The authors concluded that the film’s effects ‘on the children’s attitudes toward the Negro was still definitely present eight months after the film was shown’.¹¹⁴ Closer examination of the findings shows that rather than the film creating a general shift towards a more negative view of black people, it allowed a number of individuals to give voice to extreme opinions. Prior to the screening only a handful of respondents indicated agreement with low-scoring statements such as ‘The white race must be kept pure at all costs, even if the Negroes have to be killed off’ and ‘The Negro will always remain as he is—a little higher than the animals.’ Following the screening dozens of children concurred with such extreme statements. Prior to the screening the most extreme position few were prepared to venture beyond was a statement like ‘The Negro should have freedom but should never be treated as the equal of the white man’.

¹¹² Ruth Camilla Peterson and Louis Leon Thurstone, *Motion Pictures and the Social Attitudes of Children.*, Motion Pictures and Youth. Payne Fund Studies. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 38.

¹¹³ We can only wonder if there would have been a gradual but full return to the more liberal attitudes prior to the screening. A similar study was carried out by a sociological researcher in the same town almost forty years later and this showed that the film had ceased to impact children in such a powerful way. See Stokes, D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*, 253.

¹¹⁴ Peterson and Thurstone, *Motion Pictures and the Social Attitudes of Children.*, 61. The authors refer to an eight month gap but the data clearly indicates five months.

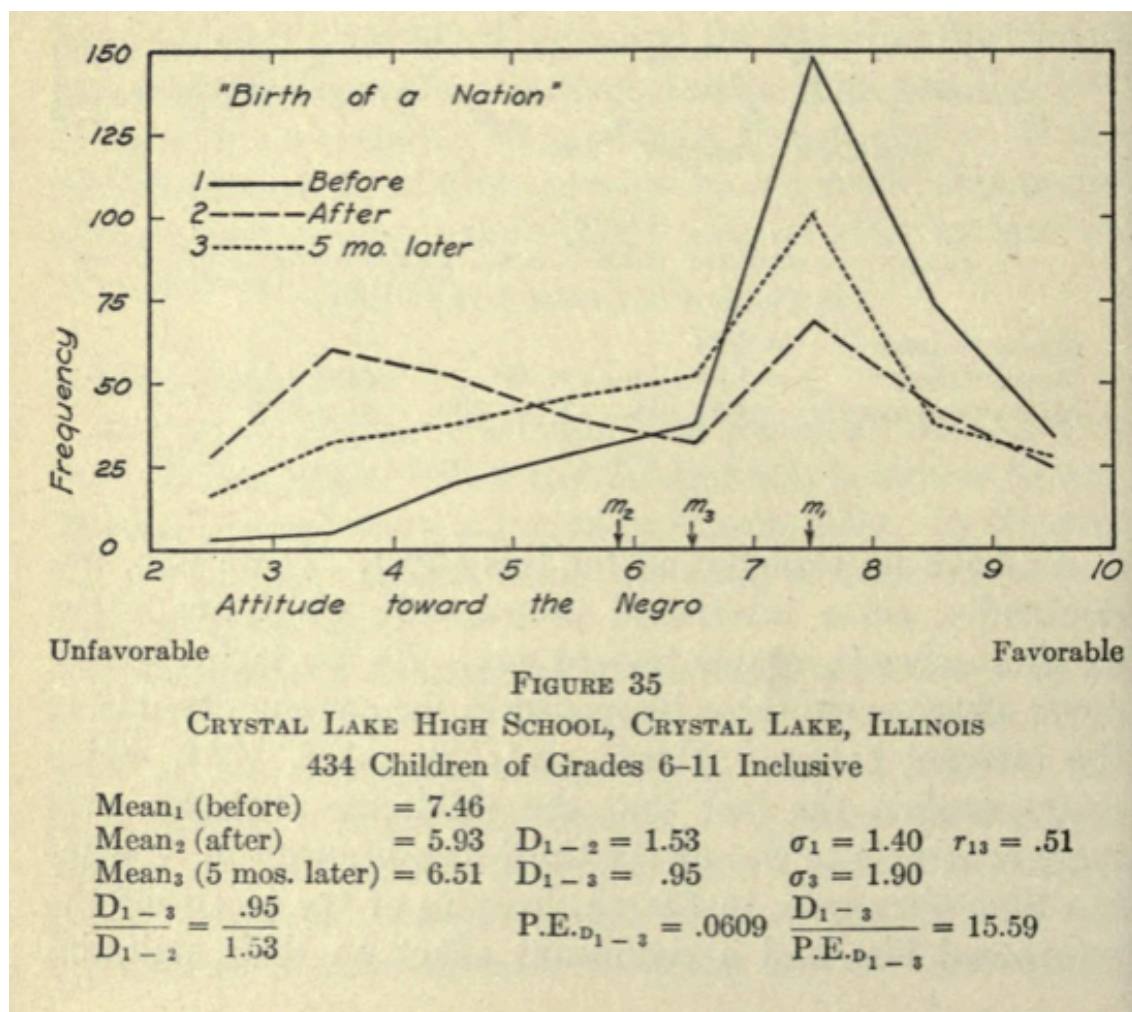


Figure 6: Crystal Lake attitudinal tests on *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)

As the various Payne Fund Studies were being carried out, Hollywood feature films were also being used in schools to help students in the field of 'human relations and social adjustment'. Pupils were asked to talk about the situations they saw on screen—using films provided from Hollywood archives—and discuss how they might have acted in similar circumstances. Around half a million children went through the programme in 1934. Will Hays, in his position as chairman of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), spoke of it approvingly at the time as 'an endeavour to take into the school a preview and practice of life itself, a rehearsal for conduct both now and after graduation'.¹¹⁵

The Payne Fund Studies failed to prove in any convincing manner that the movies did have a deleterious influence on young minds. This was not the outcome that the

¹¹⁵ Margaret Farrand Thorp, *America at the Movies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), 132.

instigators of the studies had hoped for. Particularly in its interviews and case studies it showed that young people did look to the screen for role models and guidance but that this was not always harmful and could sometimes prove to be positive. I mentioned earlier the efforts of Better Film Committees and other organisations to try to improve the content of movies as templates for good living and this became more sophisticated during the 1930s, largely thanks to one of the authors of the Payne Fund Studies, Edgar Dale. Dale's contribution to the study was *How to Appreciate Motion Pictures*.¹¹⁶ Dale challenged the idea of the viewer as a passive recipient of an underlying message and encouraged viewers to read and respond to films. The Production Code saw itself as a protective shield from the film overwhelming the passive viewer. Dale argued that this could be neutralised if film appreciation was taught in schools so that young people would understand how the medium works. Moreover, he argued that youngsters should be encouraged to make their own films and become the 'filmmakers to show us why America lynches Negroes, why hate comes so easily, why love is so cheap and sentimental.'¹¹⁷

Group Responses and Race

As discussed earlier, the alleged collective suggestibility of an audience has often been regarded as an essential part of what makes film dangerous. On the one hand, viewing a film collectively may be an uplifting experience, involving shared joys and sorrows, with the laughter of any one viewer amplified by the presence of others. On the other hand, for those who worry about the damaging effects of film, the tendency to get caught up in the emotions of the group is seen as one of its great dangers, particularly open to abuse by dictators in totalitarian regimes. Ironically, films would often play on this idea in portraying "other" types of crowd as gullible and manipulable. According to scriptwriter John Howard Lawson, one of the ways in which Hollywood producers did this was to portray people living in Africa and Asia as "primitive" crowds, lacking

¹¹⁶ Edgar Dale, *How to Appreciate Motion Pictures*, Motion Pictures and Youth. Payne Fund Studies (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933).

¹¹⁷ Edgar Dale, *Teaching Motion Picture Appreciation; an Account of a Series of Demonstrations in Forty-Five Selected Pennsylvania Cities*, (Columbus: Bureau of educational research, Ohio State University, 1936), 119.

individual initiative, and thus easily hypnotised.¹¹⁸ The cinema audience, seeing themselves as superior, would therefore reject the crowd as beneath them.

The effect of the racial makeup of a crowd on the individual's reaction to a film is remarked on by Ralph Ellison. In a piece written for *The Reporter* in 1949, specifically talking about the race cycle of films from earlier that year, he exempts *Intruder in the Dust* as the only one of the quartet 'that could be shown in Harlem without arousing unintended laughter'. This is a serious point. In contrast to the Harlem screening, he notes that in a predominantly white audience 'the profuse flow of tears and the sighs of profound emotional catharsis [is] heard on all sides'.¹¹⁹ The important emphasis here is 'on all sides', with the clear implication that it is not only the predominantly white audience who are being swept along emotionally, but also the black viewers who might otherwise be laughing along in Harlem.

What is at stake in these discussions of the power of group viewing, for the purposes of this thesis, is how drastically different our reaction to the same representation can be. The effect of being in a group can literally make us laugh rather than cry. Ellison is careful to say that the two audiences are predominantly white or black rather than entirely segregated – as many audiences would have been at the time – and stresses that although the films are laden with absurdities, they are, nevertheless, capable of deep emotional effect – an effect so strong, and charged up with guilt, that the white audience can cry in the presence of black people. Moreover, the black members of the audience experience a similar emotional catharsis.

And yet many of the key scenes showing cinema being used in a brainwashing scenario focus closely upon the single individual subjected to watching images: *The Ipccress File* (1965), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *The Parallax View* (1974). In reality, the most effective forms of brainwashing have always involved operating on a group and encouraging the belief in the power of an individual to lead all of its members to some shared end. Indeed, this was most often what was reported back from Korea, with indoctrination classes and the creation of opposing groups, along with confessions to colleagues. In the ideal conditions of the cinema we have an audience transfixed in

¹¹⁸ John Howard Lawson, *Film in the Battle of Ideas* (New York: Masses and Mainstream, 1953), 53.

¹¹⁹ Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 280–81.

space and time. As Elia Kazan puts it: 'Direction, finally, is the exertion of your will over other people ...'.¹²⁰ This calls to mind the difference established earlier between hard and soft brainwashing: the extra demand of hard brainwashing – which crosses into the realm of fantasy – of wanting to ensure that there is a correlation between inside and outside, and that this is best achieved when pressures are exerted on the individual in a solitary and enforced setting.

Such power is perhaps one of the attractions of becoming a director. Alfred Hitchcock is said to have shared a fantasy of doing away with the medium of the movie altogether and wiring the audience with electrodes so that the director could 'play on them as on a giant organ console'.¹²¹ In the direction of his rallies, Hitler can be regarded as attempting to exert the same sort of control over his audience as the film director has over his. Frank Capra was overwhelmed when he saw Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935), concluding immediately afterwards 'We can't win this war.'¹²² And possibly in calling his film about Hitler *The Great Dictator* (1940), Charlie Chaplin, the great director, was recognising similar attributes in himself.

Thought Control in the USA

Francesco Casetti highlights the importance of cinema as a tool which leads us to privilege certain aspects of the visual field. He writes:

attention leads to the construction of a new form of the whole. It is not based on a gaze that seeks to conquer the entire world by enlarging it, but on one that fixes on a simple portion of reality and finds in it the keystone to the entire situation. Thus, a whole is not the sum of its parts; if anything, it is an investment in only one part, in the conviction that it will open up to the whole.¹²³

'[A] gaze ... that fixes on a simple portion of reality and finds in it the keystone to the entire situation.' The cinema, viewed in its desired conditions, more so than any other medium, can control and direct our attention. During the 1920s and 1930s, Hollywood cinema directed the attention of its viewers towards the staging of a white world in which black people functioned only on the periphery. Mary Ann Doane shows how the cinema

¹²⁰ Elia Kazan and Michel Ciment, *An American Odyssey* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988), 30.

¹²¹ John Russell Taylor, *Hitch* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 234.

¹²² Harris, *Five Came Back*, 141.

¹²³ Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century: Film, Experience, Modernity*, Film + Culture Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 43.

audience is meant to identify with characters who are ‘emphatically coded as white: it is the white family which is the microcosm of the nation – the black family is non-existent.’¹²⁴ Or, as Jenny Barrett puts it: ‘America as a nation and the nation as family are explicitly inscribed as white’.¹²⁵ The roles for black actors were largely restricted to the ‘toms, coons, mulattoes, mammies, and bucks’ used as the title of Donald Bogle’s influential book on black representation in the cinema.¹²⁶

Bogle’s work is one of several that discuss the representation of black directors, actors, and subject matter. All of them show the demeaning stereotypes that proliferated during this time, and there is little doubt that such images had a detrimental effect on the self-esteem of black viewers; and that they encouraged white viewers to believe that they were superior. James Baldwin has described how he loathed the ‘comic, bug-eyed terror’ he associated with the performances of black actors such as Stepin Fetchit and Manton Moreland.¹²⁷ From within the film industry, the actor Howard Da Silva, speaking in 1947, bemoaned that:

the way to evade reality and to distort truth is, of course, the way of the cliché, the stereotype. Stereotype. What a beautiful Bilbonic ring the word has! A Frenchman: “Oh, la la!” An Italian: “Mama Mia!” An Irishman: “Faith and begorra!” But, best of all, the boys really like to hear. “Yessah, boss — nossah, boss”. Insult the Negro people, twist the Negro, distort him, just don’t, under any circumstances, present Negro life, and the Negro problem, with any trace of truth or reality.¹²⁸

Da Silva was speaking at a five-day conference organised by the Southern California Chapter of the Progressive Citizens of America (PCA), an organisation which was formed in 1946 to support progressive, left-liberal policies, typified by presidential candidate Henry A. Wallace. The proceedings were held between 9 and 13 July 1947 and advertised as a ‘Thought Control Conference’. It drew contributors

¹²⁴ Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 228.

¹²⁵ Jenny Barrett, *Shooting the Civil War: Cinema, History and American National Identity*, Cinema and Society Series (London: Tauris, 2009), 150.

¹²⁶ Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*. In fact the controversy aroused by the use of the “buck” rapist figure in Griffith’s film meant that the stereotype was rarely explicitly used in interwar films.

¹²⁷ James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work* (London: Michael Joseph, 1976), 20.

¹²⁸ Conference on the Subject of Thought Control in the US, *Thought Control in USA* (Beverly Hills, California: Hollywood A.S.P. Council. P.C.A, 1947), 323.

who were concerned about moves from reactionaries seeking to ‘control the cultural life of the American people.’¹²⁹ Chairman Howard Koch included ideas of racial supremacy and Manifest Destiny as important techniques in this quest. Da Silva was one of several speakers who demanded that Hollywood begin to deliver on previous promises to improve its portrayal of black people. Richard Collins, screenwriter for the controversial *Song of Russia* (1944), bemoaned the fact that few opportunities were taken to explore issues around race. He suggested that this was to pretend that ‘We have solved the Negro problem in Hollywood by ignoring Negroes in pictures.’¹³⁰ The jazz composer Phil Moore asserted that racist structures were designed to keep down all but the most powerful and that controlling the cultural output of a nation was crucial to this. If this was secured, you ‘control the actions of a nation, its work habits, its thinking and its life.’ He argued that this was the reason that black women were often portrayed as prostitutes and black men as oversexed creatures with little restraint.¹³¹

Improving the cinematic representation of black people though was never as simple as providing more numbers and more positive roles. The Performance Studies scholar Peggy Phelan makes an important point, arguing that if this becomes the only way of dealing with issues about how race is perceived and deployed, we are effectively perpetuating an ideology of the visible: ‘an ideology which erases the power of the unmarked, unspoken, unseen.’¹³² She goes on to say that: ‘The focus on skin as the visible marker of race is itself a form of feminising those races which are not white. Reading the body as the sign of identity is the way men regulate the bodies of women.’¹³³ Phelan points out, echoing Lacan, that visibility is a trap, which calls forth surveillance and the force of law. Becoming visible also ‘provokes voyeurism, fetishism, [and] the colonial/imperial appetite for possession.’¹³⁴ Put bluntly, as Phelan writes: ‘If representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture.’¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Conference on the Subject of Thought Control in the US, 2.

¹³⁰ Conference on the Subject of Thought Control in the U.S., 331.

¹³¹ Conference on the Subject of Thought Control in the U.S., 225.

¹³² Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 7.

¹³³ Phelan, 10.

¹³⁴ Phelan, 6.

¹³⁵ Phelan, 10.

The remaining chapters will assess how Hollywood and other film producers had approached racial issues since America entered World War II in 1941. They will also look at the films which directly addressed race as part of a wave of films after the conference closed. These films were exemplary instances of a largely orchestrated endeavour to bring about a transformation in American perceptions of race. However, I also interrogate less well-known films, where the makers' intentions were to exploit commercial possibilities opened up by the war. The engagement with racial issues was less conscious in these films but, I argue, no less powerful and perhaps more revealing for that reason.

Chapter 5 – American Propaganda and Race

Film must become just another weapon exactly as any other weapon in the army's armament.
Eric Knight¹

This chapter shows how American participation in World War II strengthened and institutionalised previously informal links between Hollywood and federal government. During the war, the armed services acted as a conduit for this relationship, with the Office of War Information coordinating and approving much of the output of Hollywood, ensuring that it was creating films that would improve the morale of Americans and hurt that of the enemy. The American literature and film scholar Katherine Kinney describes the period as one when:

The ideological coherence of the WWII combat film reflects an unusually literal example of what Louis Althusser called an Ideological State Apparatus in the marriage of government (civilian and military) and the entertainment industry. The Office of War Information turned to Hollywood not simply to propagate policies and war goals, but to re-imagine everyday American life in relation to the war effort.²

The war instigated this marriage, but I will show that the relationship already had a long history. It was an affiliation that had come under fire from isolationists when war broke out in Europe. This chapter will show how representatives of the industry denied at this point that they produced propaganda, but how once America entered the war, they were keen to proclaim the medium's unique ability to influence public opinion. This provides context for the production of the 1944 indoctrination film *The Negro Soldier*, a film that was made specifically to improve the morale of black soldiers and the racial tolerance of white soldiers. But this was one production; the effect which is most important when considering film as a means of social control is its cumulative and structural impact. As Daniel J. Leab puts it: 'The power of any single movie to influence a viewer permanently is limited, although repetition obviously has its effect. Constant repetition which emphasises certain stereotypes ... is overpowering.'³ *The*

¹ Eric Knight, 'Letter to Gere Knight', 24 August 1942, Why We Fight: Frank Capra, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

² Katherine Kinney, 'Cold Wars: Black Soldiers in Liberal Hollywood', *War Literature and the Arts* 12 (2000): 102.

³ Leab, *From Sambo to Superspade*, 263.

Negro Soldier represents a discrete attempt to alter prevailing racist views – and it is not without its own stereotypes and compromises – but other films made by the army at around the same time show that acceptance of whiteness as the embodiment of Americanness went unchallenged; even within films intended to challenge prejudice, the same stereotypes and limited views of black progress emerged. I conclude the chapter by looking at two other army films: *Introduction to the Army* (1944) was a recruitment film designed to prepare new recruits for life on an army base and *Kill or be Killed* (1943) was an indoctrination film shown to trained soldiers ready to go into battle, asking them to reassess what it meant to be an American. Between them, these films questioned what it meant to be a man, to be American, or to be black. They revealed these values to be malleable and open to persuasion. The conflict over who should persuade and how they were able, and allowed, to do it would be one of the defining battles of the upcoming Cold War; where the segregated and discriminated black American figured in this was one of its more intractable and obstinate features.

Army Indoctrination

The term *indoctrination* was used by military personnel prior to, and during World War II, to refer to fostering psychological integrity and clarity in a group of fighting men. Chief of Staff of the US Army, General George C. Marshall spoke of the importance of an obedient army ‘with force of habit of mind.’⁴ More recently, senior US military officers, in a book providing an introduction to military life, argue that indoctrination is a critical part of transforming civilians into military service members.⁵ Because they need to be able to subordinate self-interests, and to kill, intense persuasion is required.⁶ Another way of referring to this process during the war was as *orientation*: allowing the recruit to find out where they were, or sending them in a new direction.⁷ The most famous use of film to orient in such a way was the *Why We Fight* series of films. This

⁴ Ramon Girona and Xavier Gimeno Torrent, ‘Why We Fight and The Focused Interview. Cinema and Social Science during World War II’, *Comunicació: Revista de Recerca i d’Anàlisi* 32 (1 May 2015): 55, <https://doi.org/10.2436/20.3008.01.129>.

⁵ Thomas W. Britt, Amy B. Adler, and Carl Andrew Castro, *Military Life: The Psychology of Serving in Peace and Combat* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006).

⁶ See ‘Joining the Ranks: Indoctrination’, 28 January 2017, <http://vfpuk.org/articles/joining-the-ranks-indoctrination/>.

⁷ For a history of US army indoctrination from World War II see Christopher S. DeRosa, *Political Indoctrination in the U.S. Army from World War II to the Vietnam War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1582201>.

documentary series, overseen by film director Frank Capra, offered a Manichaeian view of the world, embracing the strict demarcations of good and evil which that implies. Much has already been written about this series and this thesis will explore less well-known films.⁸ However, its elaboration of a binary world view was important in creating a strict demarcation between free world and slave world, and this was an essential aspect in allowing the idea of brainwashing to take hold.

Capra's immediate superior was Colonel Edward Lyman Munson, who was steeped in ideas of using psychological weapons in the aid of war. His father, Brigadier General Edward L. Munson was influential in the field, and it is worth a brief detour to outline some of his ideas. After serving in World War I, Edward Munson was convinced that efforts at indoctrination were uncoordinated and ad hoc. During the war he had lobbied for a Morale Branch within the War Department and had established his own attempts at the psychological stimulation of inductees at Camp Greenleaf in Georgia. The methods he used here included 'patriotic singing, athletic events, other diverse forms of entertainment and – most important – citizenship lectures'.⁹ He also thought that efforts at raising morale were misdirected in being aimed more at citizens than at soldiers. In 1921 his book *Management of Men* was published. This provided an extensive outline of the psychological foundations of military leadership. What lay behind the *Why We Fight* series of films was summed up neatly by Munson in 1921: 'The ability to win a war means not only ability for the troops to act alike, but to think

⁸ See Peter C. Rollins, 'Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* Film Series and Our American Dream', *Journal of American Culture* (01911813) 19, no. 4 (1996): 81. Ian Scott, "'Why We Fight' and 'Projections of America': Frank Capra, Robert Riskin, and the Making of World War II Propaganda', in *Why We Fought: America's Wars in Film and History*, ed. Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor, Film & History (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008). Thomas A. Palmer, "'Why We Fight': A Study of Indoctrination Activities in the Armed Forces' (PhD, Columbia, SC, University of South Carolina, 1971). Thomas W. Bohn, 'An Historical and Descriptive Analysis of the "Why We Fight" Series' (PhD, Madison, Wisconsin, 1968). Charles Wolfe, 'Mapping "Why We Fight": Frank Capra and the US Army Orientation Film in World War II', in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film*, ed. Cynthia A. Barto Lucia, Roy Grundmann, and Art Simon (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 397–416. William Thomas Murphy, 'The Method of "Why We Fight"', *Journal of Popular Film* 1, no. 3 (Summer 1972): 185–196. Jordi Xifra and Ramon Girona, 'Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* and Film Documentary Discourse in Public Relations', *Public Relations Review* 38, no. 1 (March 2012): 40–45, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.12.003>. Harris, *Five Came Back*.

⁹ Lori Lyn Bogle, *The Pentagon's Battle for the American Mind: The Early Cold War*, 1st ed, Texas A&M University Military History Series, no. 97 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 33. This sounds like an early prototype for the brainwashing methods that would come to be used in the Korean prisoner of war camps.

alike. A common purpose is necessary before community of action is possible. This must be brought about through indoctrination.’¹⁰ The army needed to create a powerful motive for the soldier to fight; if successful, this motive would be capable of ‘so controlling his will that the victory of the army of which he is a part becomes the supreme object of his desire.’¹¹

There are some flagrant examples of racist thinking in Munson’s manual. Segregation is recommended as a means of getting the most out of men because they will want to do well for their race and therefore will be working for their battalion as much if not more so than for their country. The manual recommends the use of rhythmic song to stimulate black soldiers, which it suggests will ‘gradually speed up their tempo, to which there is unconscious response by increasing movement and output.’¹² Munson described how music had already been used in industry to increase output. In fact, the practice had a longer history: slaves were encouraged to sing to speed up their work.¹³

Munson also stated that special attention should be devoted to the ‘psychology of race’ by those at the head of the army because ‘There is a general resemblance in racial mentality which renders far more easy the psychological control of a homogenous racial stock, because it tends to think along common lines and the resulting behaviour can be more readily directed and forecasted.’¹⁴ Munson recommended that complaints from black soldiers should receive a receptive hearing. However, this was not because they need to be acted upon but because black soldiers have a ‘craving for reassurance and mental support’ and are ‘by nature relatively emotional and impulsive’.¹⁵ This kind of thinking had barely diminished almost twenty years later when senior officers at the US Army War College, based in Washington Barracks in Washington, D.C., produced a study assessing the strengths and weaknesses of black soldiers. Described as ‘docile ... careless, shiftless, irresponsible and secretive’, the best response was gained from

¹⁰ Edward Lyman Munson, *The Management of Men: A Handbook on the Systematic Development of Morale and the Control of Human Behavior* (New York: Holt, 1921), 15–16.

¹¹ Munson, 4.

¹² Munson, 205.

¹³ Sterling Stuckey, ‘Slavery and the Circle of Culture’, in *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3–97.

¹⁴ Munson, *The Management of Men*, 214.

¹⁵ Munson, 605.

them by exploiting ‘a musical nature and a marked sense of rhythm’ so that ‘with proper direction in mass, negroes are industrious. They are emotional and can be stirred to a high degree of enthusiasm.’¹⁶

For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to note these enduring racial assumptions, because they show how they were ingrained in the upper echelons of organisations such as the army. These institutions would be given responsibility during World War II for instilling values and beliefs that were thought to be representative of American citizens at their best. Munson was also keen to employ motion pictures as a means of educating and improving morale. He saw their effects as especially attuned for those of limited intelligence and the illiterate, but argued that, carefully selected, they were strongly influential on character and conduct for all. Intriguingly, he also suggested the use of a technique which, if not exactly an effort to achieve so-called subliminal advertising, was based on a similar approach. He recommended the use of “flash” slides, inserted within the movie, that would express an idea ‘with surprise and novelty’.¹⁷ Fears over such “hidden persuaders” would not surface for some time, but even before America entered the war, there was a group of senators who declared that Hollywood was already going too far in meddling with viewers’ minds.

Interstate Commerce Hearings

We have no filmed record of the Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate Commerce hearings during September 1941, which investigated the use of propaganda in motion pictures. We do have the transcript, however. It shows Darryl Zanuck, at that time Vice President in charge of production at Twentieth Century-Fox, bringing his testimony to a crescendo with a rousing passage, easy to imagine being performed by one of his film stars. The transcript even ends with [Applause]. Zanuck reminisced about how proud he was to have been associated with the movie business. He recalled ‘pictures so strong and powerful that they sold the American way of life, not only to America but to the entire world.’¹⁸ He picked out as two of his outstanding moments Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and Henry Walthall as the ‘little colonel’ in *The*

¹⁶ Stephen E. Ambrose, *D-Day, June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 147.

¹⁷ Munson, *The Management of Men*, 539–40.

¹⁸ Senate Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate Commerce, ‘Propaganda in Motion Pictures. Hearings, 77th Congress’ (GPO, Washington, DC, 1942), 423.

Birth of a Nation. The first shows the integration of a Jewish performer into America, achieved by donning blackface, and, more toxic still, *The Birth of a Nation*, predicated the real birth of the United States of America as taking place when the Ku Klux Klan violently ended hopes of black enfranchisement. In so doing, they united North and South in the myth of white supremacy and the protection of white womanhood from black sexual assault. What the selection illustrates – even while Zanuck is meant to be providing evidence of his product as a medium of entertainment as opposed to propaganda – is that film is deeply embedded in the nation's historical narrative. It can hardly fail to imbibe, reflect and disguise, its strengths, quirks, and foibles.

Zanuck was one of several Hollywood producers who had been called to defend their industry because of allegations of propaganda from various anti-interventionists. Republican Senator Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota, and Missouri Democrat Bennett "Champ" Clark initiated these claims. On 1 August 1941, the two senators asked that such allegations be referred to the Interstate Commerce Committee, chaired by fellow isolationist, Montana Democrat Burton K. Wheeler.¹⁹ Clark was responsible for the direct introduction of Resolution 152, demanding a full inquiry by the Interstate Commerce Committee into Hollywood's support for military intervention; on the same day that he submitted it, his colleague from North Dakota was making an incendiary speech in St Louis.

In front of a live audience of 2,600 people, and many more listening to a radio broadcast of the speech, Nye accused the movie moguls of Hollywood of being desperate to embark on a war alongside Great Britain. This, he declared was now the main use of their 'gigantic engines of propaganda'.²⁰ The speech was notable for its antisemitism and was full of charged language – he referred to America as being 'stripped, and oiled and groomed' for another war – while at the same time highlighting

¹⁹ Ironically, Burton K. Wheeler was thought to be the inspiration for Frank Capra's eponymous character in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, a film which like much of the director's output, could be read as a paean or a rejoinder to the idea of American liberty. Photoplay Studies, a short-lived journal dedicated to using film to encourage students to learn, used the film to provoke thoughts on 'How did the press tend to influence the judgment of the public? And 'How may the public guard itself against being deceived by propaganda?' Max J. Herzberg, 'A Guide to the Appreciation of "Mr Smith Goes to Washington"', *Photoplay Studies* 5, no. 21 (1939): 10.

²⁰ James E. McMillan, 'McFarland and the Movies: The 1941 Senate Motion Picture Hearings', *The Journal of Arizona History* 29, no. 3 (1988): 277.

a real weakness in the structure of the cinema business. Nye spoke of the dangers of the control of the movie industry being in the hands of a small number of people when their films were shown to 80 million people a week.²¹ He also claimed that the desire to support Great Britain meant that the movies misleadingly portrayed that country to be a bastion of democracy and humanity, 'while all the people who oppose her ... are drawn as coarse, bestial brutal scoundrels.' At various points in his speech, though, Nye called on the image of the devious Jew controlling agencies of power, with Hollywood as a key centre of operations. Nye characterised the movies as creations 'designed to drug the reason of the American people', 'to rouse them to a war hysteria', 'mak[ing] America punch drunk with propaganda', 'cunningly and persistently inoculating them with the virus of war'. After reading out a list of names of film company owners that were recognisably Jewish, Nye stated that these 'otherdweller[s]' were 'naturally susceptible' to 'racial emotions run riot', the result of which would be to push reason from her throne.²² Nye's use of imagery is noteworthy, drawing on common features whenever racism has been used to direct anger towards a targeted section of society: hysteria, irrationality, bestiality, and contamination have been key ingredients in all such manifestations. Nye also uses the familiar accusation that cinema hypnotises viewers, making them numb and unable to prevent the messages transmitted from the screen taking effect in the brain.

During the hearings, Senator Clark probed Harry Warner on whether he would deliberately set out to turn one racial group against another. This was precisely what happened, Clark alleged, with the anti-Nazi film *The Mortal Storm* (1940). The two men agreed that this film was intended to make the viewer feel repulsion towards Germany. But Warner countered that any statement which Senator Clark made on how he hated Nazism – which he had stated in the hearings – could have just as great an effect on the forming of others' opinions as any of Warner Bros. films might. Did that mean, asked the movie producer, that the senator's comments should be censored? Clark retorted:

²¹ For an excellent account of the Jewish contribution to the rise of Hollywood and the antisemitism it provoked see Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II*, Cambridge Studies in the History of Mass Communications (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²² Gerald P. Nye, 'War Propaganda: Our Madness Increases as Our Emergency Shrinks', *Vital Speeches of the Day*. 7 (1941): 720–23.

When I say I hate nazi-ism and that is carried in the public press people may feel that is my opinion. On the other hand, when you take the people into moving-picture houses and you throw on the screens the picture ... and there are present heads of families and their children, they sit there and view it, and ... you begin to go to work on them with lights and colour and sound. That is quite different from reading in cold type a statement by me that I hate nazi-ism, for they are more prone to say: I agree, or I disagree. After seeing the picture, I am ready to fight a one-man battle against Hitler. So, it is quite different.²³

Clark was making a similar point to Serge Chakhotin's on why the cinema was the most effective form of propaganda. Chakhotin argued that the cinematic image works in such a way that the brain is forced towards a certain way of seeing. Each image acts before anything can be processed to resist it, and there is no time to dwell on it as the next image is already on its way. Clark also emphasised the importance of the cinema space in the indoctrination process. He characterised the cinema as a social gathering where opinions are liable to be formed through mass psychology and an appeal to spectacle and the emotions. The picture is thrown on to screens, capturing the idea of a dynamic visual experience. It is interesting that he emphasised the head of the family being there with children, the implication of this surely being that this gives the exhibition added credibility. (Is he also encouraging us to think that there is a deliberate similarity to the experience of being in church?) And then there is the phrase 'go to work on them', which evokes the idea of being in a fight; instead of fists, though, the filmmakers use lights, colour, and sound. The essential point made by Clark is that when someone reads a newspaper, they can engage, chiefly in an intellectual manner, and take time to decide whether they agree with the content. The movies, in contrast, work on the emotions, and the fear of Clark is that viewers will be ready to act or agree with a course of action without really understanding why.

Clark used the review of the film *The Mortal Storm* by the critic Louella Parsons to attack the production. Parsons rated the film as one of the best she had seen that year but also claimed it 'leaves you limp as a rag and so emotionally upset that you feel as if you could go out and fight a one-man battle with Herr Hitler'. She went on to say that the film portrayed such unspeakable brutality that it must affect everyone who saw the picture.²⁴ This, then, was the basis for Clark's attack: the film caused emotional upset

²³ Senate Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate Commerce, 'Propaganda in Motion Pictures. Hearings, 77th Congress', 382.

²⁴ Senate Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate Commerce, 325.

in the viewer, and bred hatred for another country. Clark extrapolated from this that film was a dangerous medium because it could be used to make one race of people hate another.

Ironically, it is possible to read *The Mortal Storm* as a challenge to racist scientific and historical thinking in America in the 1930s. The movie contains a powerful scene where the German students demand that their Jewish professor abandons the science showing that there is no material difference between the races. The eugenicist line of attack used by the German students was inspired, at least in part, by American writers such as Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard. Indeed, Adolf Hitler himself referred to Grant's *The Passing of the Great White Race* (1916) as his Bible.²⁵ And there is also a scene of book-burning that looks similar to gatherings of the Ku Klux Klan (see below).



Figure 2: Nazis burn books in *The Mortal Storm* (1939).

Perhaps the viewer did recognise the resonance of these images for what was taking place in the country but was able to disavow them, and was helped to do this through

²⁵ Edwin Black, *War against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), 259.

the cumulative effect of moving picture stereotypes cultivated since the turn of the century. These had recently had their most seductive, and enormously powerful, rendition in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), estimated by its producer David O. Selznick, to have been seen by 64 million people in the United States and Canada alone. Peter Noble highlighted shortly after its success that films such as this were part of a process by which 'literally millions of filmgoers are yearly doped with a subtle – and sometimes extremely unsubtle – form of harmful propaganda.'²⁶

Proceedings of the Writers' Congress

The Writers' Congress was a three-day event which began on 1 October 1943, jointly sponsored by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization (HWM). The HWM was formed the day after Pearl Harbor and made itself available to various government agencies to help in the war effort. Hollywood made personnel and material available for mobilisation as soon as war was declared. Much of Hollywood's talent took large drops in salary to join the forces, and most of those who remained behind devoted themselves to making films intended to raise morale and helped with fundraising and other campaigns.²⁷

The President of the University, Robert Gordon Sproul opened proceedings with a declaration that the aim of the participants should be to 'revise the thinking of mankind.'²⁸ The screenwriter Robert Rossen stressed the importance of their role in world events, and how they now had the 'largest audience that has ever been available to any group of writers since the beginning of history'.²⁹ To emphasise this, letters were read from Chinese and Russian representatives in praise of the conference and their future partnership with America. Much of the rest of the opening session was taken up by NAACP secretary Walter White detailing the critical role that Hollywood could

²⁶ Noble, *The Negro in Films*, 75–76. We might ask if film is bound to reflect the historical, cultural, and social institutions within which the productions are imbricated? As cultural theorists such as Antonio Gramsci insist, the cinema is a concrete manifestation of the ideological sphere in which it was constructed and shares in the same struggles for power, influence, and identity.

²⁷ See Richard Koszarski, 'Subway Commandos: Hollywood Filmmakers at the Signal Corps Photographic Center', *Film History* 14, no. 3/4 (2002): 296–315. Harris, *Five Came Back*.

²⁸ Hollywood Writers Mobilization., 'Writer's Congress; the Proceedings of the Conference Held in October 1943 under the Sponsorship of the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization and the University of California.' (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1944), 2.

²⁹ Hollywood Writers Mobilization., 6.

play in the future treatment of black Americans. He said that in their previous output, Hollywood producers and writers had prepared the ground for the racist machinations of Hitler. This had been done through movies 'glorifying empire and colonial imperialism and race superiority.' Not only must this stop, demanded White, but positive screen representations of black people had to be prioritised in order to reduce racially motivated violence in the country. This was because every race riot or lynching was seized upon by the Axis press and employed towards making the people of the Pacific and Latin America believe that they would fall to a racist power if America were to win the war.³⁰

Two of the main themes which ran through the proceedings were that positive representations of black Americans should be a priority of the industry, and that the role of the movie industry in the postwar world would be even more important than it was now. Both of these strands were taken up by the award-winning screenwriter Talbot Jennings, who said that once the war was over, screenwriters could devote themselves to improving the lot of black people: 'that is the time to help them get with it, with all the means at our disposal'. He recommended that black characters should be shown casually, 'working and fighting with us as a matter of course'.³¹ This not only denied the reality of segregation but also placed the solution to any problems with "us": the typically white male screenwriters who dominated the industry and the congress.

One of the stars of the 1941 Subcommittee Hearings was also one of the most memorable speakers at this more positive gathering. Darryl Zanuck's presentation was a repeat of his earlier testimony that film must concentrate primarily on entertaining the viewer, but Zanuck this time admitted that in doing this, film could at the same time impart new ways of thinking in the audience's mind. Zanuck stressed the importance of the box office, both as a means of generating the revenue to make more socially ambitious films and in reaching the biggest possible audience. To achieve this,

³⁰ Hollywood Writers Mobilization, 14–16. For a thorough account of Walter White's participation in this forum and its surrounding context see: Brian J. Distelberg, 'Visibility Matters: The Pursuit of American Belonging in an Age of Moving Images' (PhD, Yale, 2015), Chapter 2.

³¹ Talbot Jennings, 'A Survey of Writing Problems', in *The Proceedings of the Conference Held in October 1943 under the Sponsorship of the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization and the University of California* (Writers' Congress, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1944), 56.

films had to be wrapped in the 'glittering robes of entertainment.'³² He spoke about his reasons for making *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1942). This Western told the story of a group of townspeople who formed a posse to hunt down a suspected murderer and their deliberations over whether they should lynch him. Zanuck told the congress that the aim of the film had been to offer a social comment on lynching; to do this in an entertaining way, Zanuck and his creative team decided to exploit the Western genre.³³ The conventions of the Western meant that most of the cast were white, with the leading role in the posse going to Henry Fonda and the suspected killer being played by Dana Andrews. There was a role (uncredited) for black actor Leigh Whipper, who took the part of the 'preacher and unheeded conscience' of the mob.³⁴ The critical reception for the film was generally positive but audiences were disappointing, making the film, in Zanuck's reckoning, a 'failure of sorts'.³⁵ What the film also shows is that it is possible to make films with a clear social intent without commenting directly on their actual subject of concern. A similar case is easy to make for earlier films such as Fritz Lang's *Fury* (1936) and Archie Mayo's *Black Legion* (1937). Both films seem to be obvious comments on the lynching of black people and the terrors of the Ku Klux Klan.³⁶

These public statements, separated by two years, reveal a shift in the claims that the movie industry made about its powers to alter and control public opinion and sentiment. Before the outbreak of war, it suited the industry to be seen as a mere entertainment provider. The American public was wary of all forms of propaganda and generally positive about Hollywood and cinema as a purveyor of fantasies and dreams. Propaganda was associated with totalitarianism and therefore a device with which

³² Darryl F. Zanuck, 'The Responsibility of the Industry', in *The Proceedings of the Conference Held in October 1943 under the Sponsorship of the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization and the University of California* (Writers' Congress, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1944), 34.

³³ Zanuck, 32.

³⁴ Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 67. This uncredited black presence does haunt the movie. Just as his name, Sparks, hints at fires and deadly reactions, so his persistent image at the edges of the frame, gestures towards the more likely victims of lynchings and mob justice.

³⁵ Zanuck, 'The Responsibility of the Industry', 32.

³⁶ For a reading of *Fury* which insists that there was little intent to highlight racial inequities and that the film is actually reactionary and antidemocratic see Chris Rob  , *Left of Hollywood: Cinema, Modernism, and the Emergence of U.S. Radical Film Culture*, 1st ed (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010), Chapter 3. Rob   shows how films can be co-opted – in this case by 1930s Left film critics – to encourage readings which may run counter to the director's intent.

America, at least on the surface, could not be connected.³⁷ Once America entered the war, the industry's producers knew that full cooperation with the government would stand them in better stead for upcoming challenges to their monopolistic structures.³⁸ If anything, this sometimes meant that they now claimed too much for their power to mould public opinion. In truth, filmmakers were discovering as they went along the best means of using films to advance the war effort. When it came to tackle issues of race and intolerance in the army and wider society, the industry was even less sure of how to proceed. A medium which was heavily implicated in upholding prevailing racist prejudices was now asked to help bring about a transformation of such views.

The Making of *The Negro Soldier*

The Negro Soldier is a classic example of the wartime collaboration between the film industry, government, and specialists from the worlds of academia and social planning. The film historians Thomas Cripps and David Culbert selected it for study as 'one of those rare instances which allows the historian of mass media to speak confidently about conception, execution, and – to a degree – results both intended and unintended, of a specific controversial film.'³⁹ They argue that the film should be regarded as the product of a 'social symbiosis': not the creation of one person but the coming together of 'four wary interest groups' melded in 'antagonistic cooperation'. These groups were the Army, black Americans, social scientists, and Hollywood filmmakers.⁴⁰ The project was approved by the Chief of the Morale Branch of the War Department, Brigadier General Frederick Osborn, who had spent much of the previous two decades espousing arguments in favour of eugenics, initially praising German efforts in that direction.⁴¹ His proposal for expenditure on the film showed his lingering hesitation

³⁷ Dan Schiller, *Theorizing Communication: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 42. Communication studies could be characterised as the acceptable American version of propaganda during the 1930s. It could also be argued that once the use of propaganda was acknowledged and perfected during and after the war, perhaps the invention of brainwashing as a concept was required to indicate a similar gulf between American propaganda and totalitarian brainwashing.

³⁸ Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*.

³⁹ Thomas Cripps and David Culbert, 'The Negro Soldier (1944): Film Propaganda in Black and White', *American Quarterly* 31, no. 5 (1979): 616, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2712429>.

⁴⁰ Cripps and Culbert, 617.

⁴¹ Jonathan Peter Spiro, *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (Burlington, VT; Hanover, NH: University of Vermont Press; Published by University Press of New England, 2009), 365–69.

around the subject when he stressed 'the necessity for judicious handling of this problem'.⁴² Despite such misgivings the eventual film was ambitious and went further than the relatively tame demands made by Walter White and Wendell Willkie during their recent trip to Hollywood. The two men had pleaded with film producers to make more effort to place black extras in crowd scenes. This was more expansive: a film made by some of the country's best talents, focusing entirely on black achievements, aimed at a predominantly white audience, was a major advance.⁴³

The perceived need within military and political circles for a popular film to encourage black recruitment in the army was threefold. Firstly, it was to encourage black people to join the army and to improve the initiation process. Numbers had risen sharply with the onset of war: there had been just 3,640 enlisted black soldiers when war was declared in Europe. By the time of Pearl Harbor it had grown to 97,725 – thus greatly exceeding the rate of increase of white recruits (a 25-fold increase against a five-fold growth), albeit from a much lower starting point. A year later there were some 467,883 black people enlisted, out of a total of around four million military personnel.⁴⁴ At the same time, there were virtually no black officers before Pearl Harbor: to be exact, there were five, and three of them were chaplains.⁴⁵

On 9 October 1940, the White House released a statement that black people would be accepted in the Army in numbers reflective of their proportion of the national population, at that time around 10 per cent. The army insisted that morale would be adversely affected if blacks were allowed to serve alongside whites, and it was declared that units within divisions would remain segregated.⁴⁶ Most black inductees were placed in the relatively unskilled Quartermaster Corps and Engineer Corps, where

⁴² Harris, *Five Came Back*, 134.

⁴³ Distelberg, 'Visibility Matters: The Pursuit of American Belonging in an Age of Moving Images', Chapter 2. For biographical accounts of Walter White see Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1949). Kenneth Robert Janken and Walter Francis White, *Walter White: Mr. NAACP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). For a critical account of his contributions, see Tom Dya, *Walter White: The Dilemma of Black Identity in America*, The Library of African-American Biography (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2008).

⁴⁴ Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops: Special Studies* (Washington, DC: Office of Chief of Military History, U.S. Army, G.P.O., 1963), 88.

⁴⁵ Lee, 29.

⁴⁶ Morris J. MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces, 1940–1965* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army: US Govt. Print. Off., 2001), 18.

they accounted for 15 and 25 per cent of personnel. They made up less than 2 per cent of either the Air Corps, Medical Corps, or Signal Corps.⁴⁷

Army officers were reluctant to use black people in any but the most menial roles and were also averse to sending them to the battlefield. This meant that many of them were sent to barracks within America, and this often led to tension with local communities. Southern states were reluctant to house black troops: no black units were mobilised in Texas, and Arizona petitioned that no more be sent to the state. There were also objections in Mississippi, Georgia, South Dakota, Washington, Nevada, and Michigan.⁴⁸ There was a host of racial incidents in and around the camps during the war, culminating in what the military historian Ulysses Lee referred to as a 'harvest of disorder' in the summer of 1943, with large-scale disturbances erupting in camps throughout the South.⁴⁹ Patricia Sullivan in *Days of Hope* detailed how during the war, of the 920,000 black men and women serving in the segregated armed forces, 80 per cent received their training in the south, where they were the victims of violence and discrimination, to such an extent that their families were often relieved when they were sent off to fight.⁵⁰

The second reason a film was thought necessary was because of fears expressed by members of the Morale Branch that blacks would be so disenchanted with their treatment in America that they would be susceptible to Japanese propaganda urging them not to take up arms. There was evidence of street corner speakers demanding unity among the darker peoples of the world and Japan, as the most powerful such nation, was cast in the role of leader.⁵¹ In late 1941, General Osborn said that he was increasingly concerned about the influence of the Negro press and intelligentsia on the attitudes of black soldiers and potential recruits. He invited Donald R. Young along to meetings of morale officers to address this issue.⁵² Young worked on the Social Science

⁴⁷ MacGregor, 24.

⁴⁸ Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops: Special Studies*, 102.

⁴⁹ Lee, 366. See also Harvard Sitkoff, 'Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War', *Journal of American History* 58, no. 3 (1 December 1971): 661–81, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1893729>.

⁵⁰ Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 156.

⁵¹ Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops: Special Studies*, 66.

⁵² Lee, 360.

Research Council and was an authority on race relations. He had assisted Gunnar Myrdal in conducting research for his study of racism, *An American Dilemma*, and as early as 1922 he had written a book on the movie industry.⁵³ Young recommended that the Bureau of Public Relations and the Special Service Branch should produce posters and movies that celebrated black achievements and that there should be a focus on positive news stories about black soldiers. Young was also the main author of the army report 'Leadership and the Negro Soldier',⁵⁴ discussed further below.

Thirdly, there was growing realisation that America's racist social structure was going to inhibit its burgeoning ambition to lead the free world once victory had been secured.⁵⁵ It was clear that work would be required to shift prevailing views on white supremacy and racial segregation. A 1942 National Opinion Research Center poll indicated that 60 per cent of white respondents believed that black people were content with their current situation; a majority also felt that segregation was desirable and would not need to be changed after the war.⁵⁶ The Navy Secretary, Frank Knox attacked those demanding equality by proposing that he would feel a compulsion to make changes only when the white man admitted the Negro to intimate family relationships leading to marriage.⁵⁷

General Osborn typified the attitudes of many towards race. As late as December 1942, he opined that 'if you dropped the general policy of segregation and forced white and Negro troops together in the same units, you would build up friction which you

⁵³ 'Donald R. Young, 78, Author, Sociologist and Director of Russell Sage Foundation', *New York Times*, 22 April 1977.

⁵⁴ 'Leadership and the Negro Soldier', Training, Basic and Advanced Training (Washington DC: Headquarters, Army Service Forces, October 1944).

⁵⁵ For excellent accounts of the importance of race in America's command of the global postwar arena see Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*. Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). For an account which challenges this timeline, placing the issue as one which had currency in the 1930s which became more urgent during WWII, see Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁵⁶ Hazel Gaudet Erskine, 'The Polls: Race Relations', *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1962): 138–47.

⁵⁷ Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces*, 54–55.

couldn't handle.⁵⁸ But earlier that year he had been encouraging of a suggestion made by the NAACP to organise a committee which would deliver lectures on racial topics to the troops, and he also expressed enthusiasm for shooting a film that would celebrate the contributions of Negro soldiers to the history of the United States. Osborn was receptive to the views of social scientists such as Young, Samuel Stouffer, and John Appel. Social scientists, along with psychologists and anthropologists were especially keen to explore the sociological conditions peculiar to theatres of war and 'realised that a morale film about race relations was a perfect place to test ideas about social engineering.'⁵⁹

Several reports were produced in an effort to address this issue. In March 1942, Theodore M. Berry, African American liaison officer in the OWI produced 'Blue Print of Programme for Strengthening Negro Morale in the War Effort'. Berry drew attention to what he described as 'sore spots' for serving black soldiers: segregation in the Army, the relegation of black men in the navy to menial labour, black men's lack of access to service in the marines, workforce discrimination, and Red Cross segregation of blood supplies.⁶⁰ Similar points were made in 'Leadership and the Negro Soldier', the army report compiled by Donald Young, amongst others. The authors highlighted the use of stereotypes in painting a fixed mental picture of the black American as 'a lazy, shiftless, no-good, slew-footed, happy-go-lucky, razor-toting, tap-dancing vagrant.' A large part of the responsibility for this lay with the cinema, which the report alleged was stuck in vaudevillian representations of black people. Whereas films had allowed for a wider range of English and Irish characters, black Americans were still captured as if they were part of a minstrel show.⁶¹ The cinema was also regarded as a poor source for any update on black involvement in the war, falling behind radio and magazines in a survey of black respondents in 1944.⁶² A film such as *The Negro Soldier* was supported by the report's authors as a strategic measure to

⁵⁸ Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops: Special Studies*, 304.

⁵⁹ Cripps and Culbert, 'The Negro Soldier (1944): Film Propaganda in Black and White', 621.

⁶⁰ Judith Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name: African American Religion in American Film, 1929–1949*, A George Gund Foundation Book in African American Studies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 142.

⁶¹ 'Leadership and the Negro Soldier', 67.

⁶² 'Leadership and the Negro Soldier', 70.

counter rumours and hateful opinion in the camps without having to discuss them directly.⁶³

Frank Capra originally entrusted the film project to his good friend, the director William Wyler. Wyler's initial enthusiasm for the film was blunted after he experienced Southern racism on a scouting mission, and he withdrew from the project late in 1942.⁶⁴ Stuart Heisler, a promising director who had recently filmed the notable film noir *The Glass Key* (1942), was brought in to direct, and he pointed to the need for a black writer on the project. Carlton Moss, who had staged a successful revue at the New York Apollo, *Salute to the Negro Troops* was recruited and the two men worked well together, helped along the way by Hollywood scriptwriters Ben Hecht and Jo Swerling.⁶⁵

The social scientist Charles Dollard was also recruited as an advisor, and along with Heisler and Moss he embarked on a tour of 19 Army posts, shooting film where black troops trained in large numbers.⁶⁶ Moss said that he was left alone to get on with the job and appreciated that Capra did not try to direct him in any way. However, he thought this was largely because Capra was wary of the subject matter. He referred to Moss as his 'negro consultant'; once the film garnered praise, Capra was keen to play up his role in it, which he said was mainly to tone down Moss's 'black militancy'.⁶⁷ Moss said that he had merely tried to 'ignore what's wrong with the Army and tell what's right with my people'.⁶⁸ By October 1943 they had a movie ready to be screened.⁶⁹ Senior army officers were made uncomfortable by a scene depicting a black soldier receiving aid from a white therapist and were also concerned about the recruitment implications of showing too many black officers.⁷⁰ Once the cuts had been made, the film received its premiere before the New York press, and shortly after that in front of an invited audience of black Americans in Harlem.

⁶³ 'Leadership and the Negro Soldier', 64.

⁶⁴ Joseph McBride, *Frank Capra: The Catastrophe of Success* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 492.

⁶⁵ Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 105–6.

⁶⁶ Cripps and Culbert, 'The Negro Soldier (1944): Film Propaganda in Black and White', 625.

⁶⁷ Cripps and Culbert, 'The Negro Soldier (1944): Film Propaganda in Black and White', 622–23.

⁶⁸ Quoted in McBride, *Frank Capra*, 493.

⁶⁹ McBride, 492.

⁷⁰ Harris, 305.

What we see taking place in these discussions over the style of the film, the research that was undertaken to be able to provide an accurate story, the deliberations over how content would be perceived by particular audiences, is an absolute focus on what the effects of the film would be. The purpose of the film was to instil pride in black viewers and to encourage white viewers to question any racial prejudices they held. This meant that every shot chosen, each style of edit, the narration, and the music, were working together to produce this effect in the respective audiences. The essential value of the film resided in how well it achieved this aim.

The Film of *The Negro Soldier*

The Negro Soldier begins with a preacher giving a sermon: an attempt to conjure, quite deliberately, a safe and quintessentially “American” image of religious devotion.⁷¹ We then see footage of the boxer Joe Louis regaining the heavyweight title from the German world champion Max Schmeling. Schmeling was an open supporter of Hitler and had surprisingly defeated Louis, nicknamed the “Brown Bomber”, to secure the title in 1936. When they met again the fight had accrued political significance. In the build-up to the fight, Louis visited Roosevelt in the White House, and Schmeling’s Nazi party publicist said that the German’s prize winnings would be used to build tanks back in his country. The American German Bund set up a camp near Louis’s training camp and disrupted his training on a daily basis wearing swastikas and laughing at Louis in the ring. Newspapers were not immune from cheap racist stereotyping: *Birmingham News*’s Margaret Garrahan referred to Louis as a ‘tan-skinned throw-back to the creature of primitive swamps who gloried in battles and blood.’⁷² Next in the film, we see Max Schmeling in training for the German army as a paratrooper, with the narrator informing us that he is an example of ‘men turned into machines’. Joe Louis is then pictured going through his own induction and the film is honest enough to show him only with fellow black recruits as this would have been the only option open to him; although, rather than honest in its approach, this could also have been the

⁷¹ One of the ironies of the film is that Carlton Moss ended up playing the preacher because those black actors who had tests for the role seemed unable to break out of the stereotypical black acting styles that they had been compelled to adopt to carve out any sort of Hollywood career. Cripps and Culbert, ‘The Negro Soldier (1944): Film Propaganda in Black and White’, 625.

⁷² Bill Gaither, ‘Louis-Schmeling: More than Just a Fight’, ESPN.com, 19 June 2013, http://kwese.espn.com/boxing/story/_/id/9404398.

desired tack, as the film is keen not to offend the white viewer.⁷³ Louis is shown training for 'the real championship of the world, to determine which way of life shall survive: their way or our way.'

The preacher gives a potted history of black contributions to American history. His narration is illustrated with shots of Hollywood recreations of historical events. However, because they reveal no black figures, these are added either via text or paintings. Black and white hands are pictured building a country together when obviously most blacks would have had no actual investment but would have been used as slaves. The film passes over the Civil War in roughly ten seconds with a shot of the Lincoln Memorial and a reminder of how the United States is formed of a government of the people being delivered by the people for the people. This is where the so-called 'strategy of truth' or 'propaganda of fact', which Capra liked to put across as the abiding motivation of his team, is shown to be unambitious and misleading. It actually consisted – as here – in emphasising the facts that supported a position and passing over those that did not. The film tells no outright lies about the Civil War, but to omit any mention of black contributions to it in the context of such a production was still dishonest.

The film extols the contribution made by black troops during World War I and the gratitude that was expressed in France to black soldiers in particular. The racist backlash to which many black troops returned goes unmentioned. The film celebrates the achievements of black Americans in various industries and entertainment but unproblematically connects these to studying at segregated black universities. If these scenes seem weak and unadventurous now, grasping at any instance of black achievement as something to be celebrated, the whole film was then seen (notably by

⁷³ By showing segregated troops the filmmakers are being honest and presenting a realistic portrayal of army life. But without any comment on it they are also normalising this as a process. Moreover, the black troops are shown as being successful, so it could even be argued that the segregation is allowing them to prosper. Showing troops working together across the racial divide is less honest but it does make it thinkable and thus more likely to become a reality. The same is true in historical representations which show black actors in roles they may have been unlikely to fill. Such inaccuracies are lesser than the importance of positive representations and can be welcomed because of the benefit they can bring to future racial attitudes.

Richard Wright and Langston Hughes) as a major step forward for the acceptance of black people as part of the nation's history and future.⁷⁴

The story in the film then moves to Pearl Harbor. Here, in order to generate the "right" sort of propaganda, a figure who could have been used to valorise the role of black people in the war was partially sacrificed. During the attack on Pearl Harbor, Doris "Dorie" Miller was one of the heroes of the defence, putting himself at the forefront of the action and taking up an anti-aircraft gun to ward off the attackers. He survived the attack, but the film chooses to imply that the Japanese killed him, and in doing this the narrative maximises the threat that the Japanese posed to black lives. Miller initially went unnamed in reports of the attack, his acknowledgement amounting to a commendation for an unnamed Negro. African American newspapers took up the cause of getting the man named. They succeeded, although a typographical error led to him being known as Dorie Miller rather than his given name of Doris.⁷⁵ In *The Negro Soldier*, Doris displays exemplary bravery but is killed by Japanese bullets. This was necessary to illustrate that the Japanese were a deadly threat to the future of black Americans, and that black recruits were required to ensure that his life was not lost in vain. This interpretation was set up by Carlton Moss. He narrated in the film, in the role of the preacher, that 'there are those who still tell that Japan is the saviour of the coloured races.' In order to completely contradict this, it was necessary to sacrifice a living black hero.

When social scientists and military officials discussed the first potential screenings of the film, some expressed concern that showing it to an audience of black soldiers might spark a riot. They agreed to show it as a test screening to a black audience in San Diego, but also drafted in a hundred military police as a precaution. The feedback from the audience was positive, calling for the film to be screened as widely as possible. Then the film was shown to white soldiers, who were equally enthusiastic about a general release. The Research Branch conducted surveys which showed overwhelming support for the widest possible distribution of the film.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Harris, *Five Came Back*, 306–7.

⁷⁵ Thomas W. Cutrer and T. Michael Parrish, *Doris Miller, Pearl Harbor, and the Birth of the Civil Rights Movement*, First edition, Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series, number 158 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2018).

⁷⁶ Cripps and Culbert, 'The Negro Soldier (1944): Film Propaganda in Black and White', 628–30.

A wide range of influential figures stepped forward to help secure a theatrical distribution for the film, among them businessperson Nelson Rockefeller, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, Cardinal Spellman, and journalist Harold Ross. The NAACP's Roy Wilkins took the lead in garnering this support, while the organisation's secretary, Walter White, used his Hollywood connections to corral support from the movie business.⁷⁷ The film did receive a theatrical distribution, but a 43-minute running time made it an awkward fit for programmes and it only received a screening in 1,819 theatres, whereas similar Signal Corps films were often shown in over ten thousand theatres.⁷⁸

The film made its biggest impact in what has come to be known as "useful cinema". A 16mm print of the film was made available for hire and this was used widely by churches and schools. Cripps and Culbert suggest that the film was used as a source of black pride.⁷⁹ Although the history shown was riddled with erasures, it was the first time many viewers would have seen such a concentrated celebration of black contributions to the growth of America. Musicals such as *Hallelujah!* (1929), *Showboat* (1936), *Stormy Weather* (1943), and *Cabin in the Sky* (1943) might have showcased black people as consummate entertainers, but they entertained as stereotypes and had no real life outside of the stage on which they were contained and segregated. A similar accusation could be levelled at the spiritual rural blacks inhabiting the screen adaptation of *The Green Pastures* (1936). *Time* magazine's film reviewer reported that when he had watched *The Negro Soldier*, the black soldiers in the audience had broken into applause before the film ended.⁸⁰ There was concerted support for the film from various media, strikingly from the eponymous character in the radio soap opera *Stella Dallas*, describing how she had seen the film and had 'learned things I had never known before.'⁸¹

I dwell on these details because they illustrate how this film was engineered as precisely as possible for greatest audience impact by specialists from the army, the government, academia, and Hollywood. They show how, in the case of Doris Miller,

⁷⁷ Cripps and Culbert, 633.

⁷⁸ Cripps and Culbert, 632.

⁷⁹ Cripps and Culbert, 632–36.

⁸⁰ Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name*, 203.

⁸¹ Weisenfeld, 202.

the truth was subverted for what was a more useful story. Most importantly, they show how the ensorcelling power of film is only completed when it truly captures its audience. Perhaps this was a film that required the more contemplative, appreciative surroundings of a church or a school, and the shared experience of an otherwise neglected and misrepresented audience, to fulfil its original aim. *The Negro Soldier* morphed from being a film intended to assist the indoctrination of black soldiers into the army into one that was shown in churches and social gatherings in order to cement black civic pride. Typical of the support which the film received was a letter from the Council for Civic Unity which said that the film was ‘one of the finest documentaries ever made’ and that it would ‘do a great deal to destroy the racial stereotype which is one of the chief obstacles to full cooperation between the races.’ It urged that the film should be given the widest possible commercial distribution.⁸² Charles Skouras of Twentieth Century-Fox said that he intended to show it in all of the company’s West Coast theatres, and shared with Lehman Katz of the Army Signal Corps that the production could be considered ‘the finest film ever produced.’⁸³ This compromised, polite, accommodating film was a milestone for the cinema and for race relations in America. It showed that black Americans were as integral to American history as Italians, Poles, Swedes, and Anglo-Saxons, and made them part of the “melting pot”. It dismissed the polemic of *The Birth of a Nation* without once mentioning the film; without being overtly political, it prepared the ground for the demand for full civil rights.

Kill or Be Killed

In 1943, the US Signal Corps produced a film titled *Kill or Be Killed*, for the use of the Commanding General of the Army Ground Forces. The film is only nine minutes long and its narration is feverish, intent on getting the message across that any American soldier must be prepared to kill; indeed, more than that, he should not hesitate to kill. The scenes are graphic even to the modern viewer, showing throats being slit and bludgeons being used to pummel an opponent to death; considering how heavily

⁸² Dr E.C. Farnham, ‘Letter to War Activities Committee’, 23 March 1944, Motion Picture Association of America. Production Code Administration records: *The Negro Soldier*; Stuart Heisler; 1944, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

⁸³ Lehman Katz, ‘Letter to Frank Capra’, 1944, *Why We Fight*: Frank Capra; Anatole Litvak; Anthony Veiller; 1942–1945 (20th Century-Fox, 1942–1945), Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

censored American cinema was at that time, the film must surely have had a visceral effect on the viewer, especially as he was being asked to place himself in the role of the actor. The narrator insists that all notions of fair play have been left behind on the playing fields and sports grounds of America and that now, anything goes. There is no room for debate: the American combatant must change his mindset, or he will be killed.

The narrator tells the soldier:

When you step from the gridiron to no-man's-land the rule book is buried and forgotten; here there are no penalties except the one for losing, and it's not measured in yards, it's measured in life and death. War is the law of the jungle: kill or be killed. There are no half-measures, no alibi runs. You've got to twist your instincts inside out to play this game, because it's played to win, any way. Your goal is destruction, pure and simple; your mind must be tuned to a new pitch; to go after your enemy all out, no holds barred: to hurt, to cripple, to kill. This is war.

Your mind must be tuned to a new pitch. The narration increases in speed and intensity as the images morph from American football to jungle combat. The overall message is that all that has been learned as decent and moral behaviour should be left behind; the war provides license for the most aggressive and hostile instincts to be given free and full rein against the enemy.

As the title clearly states, *Kill or be Killed* was meant to deliver lessons of mortal importance. It was made at a time when, as we have seen, leading politicians, army spokespersons, and social scientists, emphasised the value of positive racial representations. Yet this film, which would be viewed by black and white soldiers, was devoid of any black representation. Any message about inclusion that was supposed to have been part of the reason for the making of *The Negro Soldier* was not delivered in this production, which was made at the same time. All the scenes from America are of white sportsmen and every combatant on the battlefield is white. Unless the film was one such as *The Negro Soldier* or the later short film *Teamwork* (1945), created to show the value of black troops, they were absent from training films (except in films about venereal disease, in which they suddenly took on a featured role⁸⁴), thereby illustrating how naturalised and structural racism had been made in America.

⁸⁴ In the 1947 Army training film on the dangers of venereal disease, *Easy to Get*, the first soldier we see is black.

Introduction to the Army

When a film which was made to act as an induction to army life deals with racism, this boxing-off of the issue appears even more starkly. *Introduction to the Army* (1944) follows the journey of a young white American receiving his notice to serve in the army. Concerned about what he is about to be thrown into, he runs to the home of an older friend who was drafted earlier and is now back on leave. The older man gives him an introduction to life in an army camp in which everyone we see is white, from the recruitment office to the army barracks. With incessant drills and ritualised duties, the aim is to strip the men of individual identity and instil a belief that their role is solely as part of a unit.⁸⁵ They are expected to feel comfortable because the army has taken all reasonable measures to ensure that all of the men are cut from the same cloth. The narrator is shown going through a psychiatric examination and is asked three questions: whether he is married – he is not; then whether he likes girls – he answers enthusiastically that he does; and finally, how well he thinks he will take to the army – he believes that he will take to it as well as anyone else. Passed as a heterosexual male who thinks he is no better or worse than his fellow American, the psychiatrist closes his case book, happy to sign him off for combat.

Halfway through the film, as the men are about to sleep, the narrator does bring up the subject of race and prejudice. He has just advised a colleague that he has brought excessive baggage with him and should take it to the post office in the morning. He offers the viewer these closing thoughts before sleep. They are addressed with a heightened degree of urgency but take less than a minute to share. He says:

That fella made a very natural mistake. All you want to bring to the reception centre is a toothbrush, a pair of socks, a couple of clean handkerchiefs and a sense of humour. But what you mustn't bring is a load of stupid prejudices [we see a black platoon – the only black faces in the film]. If you've got any, leave 'em at home. It's no use saying that lots of us don't have them and that it won't take a lot of time for the world to get rid of 'em. But as I say: Don't bring 'em into the army. Take people as they come. In the army, it's the type of soldier a man makes that counts.

Once this has been said, our narrator goes to sleep and awakes next morning surrounded by an all-white platoon; race and prejudice receive no further verbal or

⁸⁵ The film has a repeated emphasis on men being literally stripped and insists on them losing any sense of unease or shame around nakedness as part of army life.

visual recognition. In fact, the statement that ‘lots of us’ share prejudices but that they have no place in the army almost implies that just like the colleague who is going to drop off his extra baggage at the post office for collection when he returns, so such prejudices can be left, ready to be picked up, once the army engagement is over.

Deadly Persuasions

The director of the film *Kill or Be Killed* went uncredited, and today very few people would be aware of him; and yet in the field of hidden persuasion he may have been one of the most influential – if unheralded – players. After completing his war work, Marvin Rothenberg was taken on by a company called Transfilm who made television commercials for New York advertising agencies. At this point, many of the television campaigns were made in Hollywood, and Rothenberg’s wartime filmmaking contacts were an asset for the emerging company. With the boom in demand for television sets and the lack of a company dedicated to creating commercials, Rothenberg spotted a gap in the market and gathered some partners to create MPO Television Films (later known as MPO Videotronics). This meant that his dedicated production company with its own technical teams, including choreographers and art directors, was able to steal a march on its rivals and became the industry giant, at its height delivering around two thousand commercials a year. Some of the most familiar images from that period, such as the dancing cigarettes of Lucky Strike and Palmolive Liquid’s “Madge the Manicurist” were MPO creations. Rothenberg managed to get top stars of the day to work with him, such as Frank Sinatra and Lucille Ball, and even political figures such as Dwight Eisenhower and Eleanor Roosevelt. It is possible to see the lessons learned from making military training films such as *Kill or Be Killed* in his approach to getting actors to work on his commercials. He described his method as, ‘Even though they only have to hold up a white shirt or munch on some product, they have to know the meaning of what they're doing.’⁸⁶

Two final details demonstrate how these seemingly disconnected worlds of advertising, war training films, senate investigations into Hollywood propaganda, and race relations, were linked in a myriad of ways. Firstly, the creative yet tightly

⁸⁶ Robert McG Thomas Jr, ‘Marvin Rothenberg, 79, Dies; Director of Legendary TV Ads’, *The New York Times*, 2 October 1997, sec. N.Y. / Region, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/02/nyregion/marvin-rothenberg-79-dies-director-of-legendary-tv-ads.html>.

commercially organised business of advertising proved a valuable training school for future filmmakers, and many employees would later find careers in Hollywood. Secondly, Rothenberg's company sought out actors who had been blacklisted as a result of the investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC); he also deliberately tried to hire black filmmakers and technicians because he was aware that they found it difficult to secure work with the major film studios.⁸⁷ There is some irony here: that those people who were deemed too incendiary to appear before the American public in full view ended up in positions where they were able to influence the minds of American consumers through hidden manipulations.

⁸⁷ Thomas Jr.

Chapter 6 – A Japanese Turn

*Our problem is in the brain of the Japanese head.*¹

The previous chapter illuminated the questions elaborated, forestalled, denied, and ignored, when those deemed non-white have been captured by the camera's lens. Filmmakers had largely served to affirm and reinforce limiting racial stereotypes. Even more damagingly, by their absence, or at best peripheralisation on the screen, non-whites were confirmed as less important than white people, or as literally insignificant. So far, I have looked at how this affected black Americans and whether the ways in which white Americans have been instructed to see them could be considered as akin to brainwashing. Of course, when the term brainwashing was invented, it was in the context of the figure of the Oriental, specifically in China and Korea. On the one hand, this supports my contention that there is an equivalence between the idea of the racialised Other and the subject who is thought to be susceptible to brainwashing; on the other hand, the Oriental enemy was attributed an inscrutability and the power to seduce, which was, generally, denied to the black American. This made them individuals who were as likely to cause an American to fall under a spell, as they were to succumb to brainwashing themselves.

From its outset, Hollywood had represented the Japanese through a narrow range of stereotypes. They were portrayed as small, visually impaired, obsequious, and deceitful. Whether shown in China or in Chinatown, the figure of the Oriental often carried a danger connected to the possibility of deceit and betrayal. This idea of an ever-present treachery in the Oriental was part of the attraction to the figure of Dr Fu Manchu. The film scholar Eugene Franklin Wong argues that creations such as Fu Manchu 'satisfy the apparent white racist craving for an Asian enemy whose avowed purpose would be the total subjugation of the white race, exposing in the process the exotic and mysterious world of the East.'² The creator of Fu Manchu, Sax Rohmer, confessed that he had little real knowledge of the Chinese but declared this was a help

¹ From the film *Our Job in Japan* (1945).

² Eugene Franklin Wong, *On Visual Media Racism: Asians in the American Motion Pictures, The Asian Experience in North America* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 56.

in the drawing of the character. All of his knowledge came from the stereotypical world of the simulacra of Chinatown.³

Characterisations of Japanese weakness were shattered by the daring and skilful execution of the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, and the ferocity of the subsequent fighting once war was declared. The tactic then deployed was to borrow from and adapt attributes which had been applied to black Americans for most of America's history. The fighting Japanese remained deceitful, but they were now endowed with great physical strength, a primitive command of the jungle environment, rapacious lust, and a herd mentality. What we see with the Asian stereotypes, more so than we do with African ones, before and after the war, is an emphasis on wiliness and mental subterfuge. It should therefore come as no surprise that it was when American soldiers were held captive in Asia that fears of being taken over, and controlled by a foreign agent, came to the fore.

Two key films of the 1930s portraying Orientals in this seductive, exoticised manner were directed by Frank Capra, who would oversee the making of American propaganda films during the war. In 1932 he released *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* and five years later *Lost Horizon*. The first portrayed a Chinese warlord, General Yen (Nils Asther), seducing the white American who has fallen captive to him, Meghan, played by Barbara Stanwyck. *Lost Horizon* presents Asia itself as the temptation for a group of stranded Westerners to give up modernity and live in a secluded utopia: the Shangri-La of the 1933 James Hilton novel on which the film was based. *Lost Horizon* was released during a trio of Capra films that would contribute towards enunciating what it means to be a good American citizen: *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), and *Meet John Doe* (1941). Recognising the power he wielded, Capra spoke in 1940 of how, 'For two hours you've got 'em. Hitler can't keep 'em that long. You eventually even reach more people than Roosevelt does on the radio.'⁴

This chapter looks at four films which portrayed the Japanese in ways that resonated with American propaganda aims during World War II. *Know Your Enemy: Japan* (1945) was an offshoot of the *Why We Fight* series of orientation films, and took three years to make. Achieving the right approach proved so problematic that it was

³ Wong, 57.

⁴ McBride, *Frank Capra*, 432.

never seen during the war. This chapter considers what was at stake in the various iterations of the film, and the disputes which they generated. It also examines two films that were made with far less fanfare, and in much quicker time, towards the end of the war. *Our Job in Japan* (1945) was made by the same Capra unit which produced *Know Your Enemy: Japan* but its aim was somewhat different. The filmmakers were already grappling with ways in which postwar America would deal with the Japanese, and whether the stereotypes deployed in the war needed to be revised. This army orientation film located the problem of postwar reconstruction in the Japanese brain. The solution resided in how America could best control that brain. Made at about the same time, the Hollywood B-movie *First Yank into Tokyo* (1945) established unbreachable barriers between Americanness and Orientalism. This film reprised some of the themes which were apparent in the earlier *Behind the Rising Sun* (1943), particularly racial heritage, malleability to indoctrination, and the truthfulness of the movie camera. What was simmering on the surface of these films was an anxiety over national and racial identity. Both films revealed an uneasiness about how people can be transformed from seemingly civilised allies to dangerous vicious enemies. At the same time, the attempt to explain how this had occurred offered hope that with America at the controls, new restorative forms of social engineering could be employed to create a better world citizen; but the malleability of identity which this implied presented its own emerging issues. How far should such techniques be taken in securing a world which allows all citizens to be granted freedom? If communist and fascist beliefs can be removed through psychological advances, should such methods become common practice? The ideas which move between the films, and the various ways in which they are disrupted, displaced, and reappropriated, helped to lay the ground for views which coalesced around the concept of brainwashing: the conviction that un-American beliefs were irrational and the belief that social engineers were capable of moulding the human mind for good or for ill.

Pearl Harbor

In the early daylight hours of Sunday 7 December 1941, Japanese bomber planes attacked the United States military base of Pearl Harbor, situated near Honolulu on the island of Hawaii. That the Japanese had shown such temerity, along with the military planning and technical execution required for the operation, came as a shock to the United States, but that America would now be a full participant in a truly global

war came as less of a surprise. Eight of the ten top-grossing films of 1941 had been about war. Although the subcommittee hearings into Hollywood as a seat of propaganda had been dismissed, the industry was already geared up to preparing the country to join the war.

The day after the attack, the *Los Angeles Times* published an editorial which immediately captured how coverage of the war against the Japanese would ensue. Under the headline 'Death Sentence of a Mad Dog', it opined that 'Japan has asked for it. Now she is going to get it.' The editorial used the language of feminine duplicity throughout, referring to how the country operated 'from the darkness of her abode in the back alleys of civilisation', and of how 'she has long been called the "yellow peril", yet it remained for Japan herself to prove by this act how yellow she really is. Treachery and hypocrisy are the Medusa handmaidens of cowardice'. All references to the United States were in the male gender and the readership was informed that 'this is a time for every American to show his true colors'. The Japanese were claimed to be so untrustworthy and inherently disloyal that already, 'alert, keen-eyed civilians' were being urged to be on the lookout for signs of their dissimulating behaviour. Although some Japanese could be loyal to America, 'what the rest may be we do not know, nor can we take a chance in the light of yesterday's demonstration that treachery and double-dealing are major Japanese weapons.'⁵ Ironically, because the Japanese anticipated that the Americans would come down hard on West Coast Japanese, they deliberately recruited non-Japanese Americans as agents.⁶ In fact, all 19 people who were arrested for being agents of Japan during WWII were white Americans.⁷

In his incisive account of the effect of racialised thinking on the course of the Pacific War, the historian John Dower shows how there was plenty of evidence before Pearl Harbor that the Japanese had developed one of the most advanced fighter planes, the Mitsubishi Zero. Reports from various sources alerting the American military to this were either scorned because the Japanese were not thought to have the technical ingenuity to make such aircraft, or dismissed as inconsequential because they did not

⁵ 'Death Sentence of a Mad Dog', *Los Angeles Times*, 8 December 1942, Morning edition, A.

⁶ Fraser A. Sherman, *Screen Enemies of the American Way: Political Paranoia about Nazis, Communists, Saboteurs, Terrorists and Body Snatching Aliens in Film and Television* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011).

⁷ Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 54.

have pilots capable of flying them. It was rumoured that the Japanese could not shoot straight because they had slanted eyes. Indeed, it took a little while after the attack for some to believe that it could have been carried out by the Japanese. General MacArthur at first insisted that it must have been the work of white mercenaries, and the British advanced the theory that there were Germans in the cockpits. Once it became clear that it was the Japanese who had pulled off the stunning attack, claims surfaced that they had also been responsible for deliberately engineering the idea that they could not shoot straight, in order to profit from the surprise nature of the attack.⁸ What is revealing about this is how those racial ideas which were no longer useful were dropped, while those that could be used to further demonise the enemy were retained. So, the incompetence and backwardness which had been incorrectly ascribed as a racial characteristic was not seen as a mistake but instead reframed as proof of a more defining trait of the Japanese enemy: their incorrigible propensity to deceive and mislead.

Once America entered the war it was clear that black people would be required to fight and to work in the munitions trade and supporting industries. Given the racist and segregated reality of the country – and the conviction on the part of many black thinkers that America had reneged on its promises of better treatment after World War I – the collaboration of its black population was not something that could be taken for granted.⁹ Japan was already reaching out to black Americans as “coloured brothers” under white colonial rule, and there was anecdotal evidence of black people delighting in seeing America suffering military defeats. It was perhaps the familiarity of the images used to denigrate the Japanese that encouraged a sense of fellow-feeling amongst many blacks.¹⁰ A survey carried out by the Office of Facts and Figures in early 1942 revealed that almost half of black respondents thought that life under the

⁸ John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), Chapter 5: Lesser Men and Supermen.

⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois is a key figure in this history. He was supportive of black involvement in World War I and felt betrayed by the lack of support for civil rights in its aftermath and the explosion of violence against black people in the course of 1919. See Chad Williams, ‘World War I in the Historical Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois’, *Modern American History* 1, no. 1 (2018): 3–22, <https://doi.org/10.1017/mah.2017.20>.

¹⁰ Examples include when racial tensions were running high in Detroit, black workers tearing down a poster of a white woman being menaced by a Japanese soldier. Jeffrey Geiger, *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 129.

Japanese would be at least as good as it was in America in its current state.¹¹ Findings such as this led to a concerted public relations effort to make black Americans think that they belonged to the country just as much as did its white population. Racist stereotypes were redirected so that images which had been used to attack black people were redeployed against the Japanese. It also meant that stereotypes which had been used to speak about Asians as a totality became restricted and sharpened to speak only about the Japanese; different, more positive stereotypes were harnessed to apply to the Chinese, who were to be cast as a friend of America until the communists secured control of the country in 1949.

The way in which the Chinese switched from being an ally to an enemy of America, with a refinement of the images used to capture their alleged national characteristics, was one of several such shifts that took place in and around World War II. The image of the Japanese was transformed again once attractive trading conditions were established between Japan and America following the American occupation of the country. Russia also went from being an enemy to an ally and back again within half a decade. Countries from where many Americans had long family heritage, such as Germany and Italy, came to be seen as threats to the futures of American children. The instability and changeability of what were supposed to be solid nationalistic attributes could have only complicated emerging questions of identity.

Since the passing of the Immigration Act of 1924, all Japanese were refused entry to America (as were all Asians, apart from those from the Philippines, until 1952).¹² Most of those already in America were on its west coast. This meant that few Americans came into direct contact with Japanese people and were therefore dependent on mediated accounts of them. When Japan launched its attack on America, the image of the cunning and unassimilable Japanese was taken as a definitive statement of national character. Japanese Americans were seen as having loyalty only

¹¹ Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, 'Blacks, Loyalty, and Motion-Picture Propaganda in World War II', *The Journal of American History* 73, no. 2 (September 1986): 385–87. The response of black people to the prospect of Japanese rule differed significantly from the projection of Nazi rule, under which only one per cent of black respondents felt that they might find improved conditions.

¹² See Aristide R. Zolberg, *Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), Chapter 8. Wong argues that the Japanese were furious about the Immigration Act, and the representations of Asians in American films only caused further damage to the sense of damaged pride. Wong, *On Visual Media Racism*, 63.

to the Japanese emperor and any evidence of assimilation was no more than an attempt to create a front that would allow them to cause havoc and aid the cause of the enemy. For this reason, around 112,000 Japanese Americans were incarcerated in conditions that many likened to early German concentration camps. President Roosevelt twice publicly used the term *concentration camp* to refer to the detention facilities and his Joint Chiefs of Staff used the term repeatedly. Historian Greg Robinson prefers not to use the term – though others have – but recognises the importance of characterising the centres as ‘prison barracks surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards, who shot at and in some instances killed inmates who went too far.’¹³ It is also pertinent to suggest that the fact it was felt necessary and appropriate to imprison the Japanese during the war – and not the Germans or Italians – strengthens the claim that ideas of race, capture, and segregation run concentrically in the minds of the dominant population.

Justifying the policy of internment, the *Los Angeles Times* emphasised that Japanese-Americans had been given such a title only by ‘accident of birth’ and that they remained Japanese because ‘A viper is nonetheless a viper wherever the egg is hatched. A leopard’s spots are the same and its disposition is the same wherever it is whelped.’¹⁴ Alongside images of apes were configurations of the Japanese acting in the same way as bees or ants or rats. Many of the marines who went into Iwo Jima did so with the legend “Rodent Exterminator” stencilled on their helmets, and the governor of Idaho objected to the presence of any Japanese in his state because ‘They live like rats, breed like rats and act like rats.’¹⁵ German and Italian Americans were not treated in a similar way. This was despite the fact that there was organised support of Germany in communities with large German populations and an estimated membership of 20,000 in the German-American Bund. Although measures would be taken against dangerous individuals in these communities, the people as a whole were regarded as assimilated Americans.

The War Relocation Authority (WRA) was aware of the importance of working closely with Hollywood to manage how the nation’s moviegoers would receive the internment of the Japanese. In a confidential bulletin sent in October 1942, the WRA

¹³ Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 261.

¹⁴ W.H. Anderson, ‘The Question of Japanese-Americans’, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 February 1942.

¹⁵ Dower, *War without Mercy*, 136.

first recognised and supported the movie industry's intention to present the 'despicable nature' of the enemy; at the same time, it urged them not to over-emphasise the disloyalty of the few. The WRA stated that it was the difficulty of separating loyal from disloyal Japanese Americans which was making the job difficult and necessitating wholesale solutions. The problem with 'these people' on the West Coast was that they all 'look like our Japanese enemies.'¹⁶ Earl Warren described what he saw as the pernicious problem with the Japanese. He said that it was possible to test the loyalty of the Italians and Germans that enabled some to be freed and others detained, but 'when we deal with the Japanese we are in an entirely different field and cannot form any opinion that we believe to be sound.' This was despite the fact that the Office of Naval Intelligence had carried out an independent investigation of the Japanese in late 1941 and found no evidence of any disloyalty.¹⁷

Insects and Extermination

Dower makes a strong case that the best way to approach World War II, and particularly its Pacific battlefield, is to think of it as a race war. From the start, the Japanese were approached as a race apart. Although the people were invariably treated as a monolithic block, this took various manifestations. The use of simian imagery was most prominent. As the war began, the Japanese were portrayed as primitive and childish and suffering from a mental and emotional deficiency. Then, as fighting became increasingly violent, the Japanese soldier was transformed into a creature as strong as an ape and completely at home in the jungle environment, often shown swinging through trees. Once Japan had surrendered, the simian trope was retained, but this time the Japanese citizen was reduced to a pet monkey sitting on the shoulder of his more powerful American carer. But this was not a new switch of such racist characterisations. The same kind of adaptation had been employed in America to depict native Indians and African-Americans. Moreover, these characteristics were given empirical credibility by Western science from the nineteenth century.¹⁸ When America went to war with Spain in 1899, the enemy was turned into a 'dark and savage

¹⁶ 'Confidential Special Bulletin on Japanese Relocation', 1943, Mark Sandrich Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

¹⁷ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, New paperback edition / with a new forward by the author, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 176.

¹⁸ Dower, *War without Mercy*, Chapter 1: Patterns of a Race War.

foe', and cartoons showed him as an ape.¹⁹ Such images had also been used in World War I to portray the German 'monster', often pictured as a marauding ape that would kidnap and slaughter women and children from the countries that Germany was invading.²⁰ So, the use of animal imagery was a well-used method of belittling and attacking the enemy during times of war.

A combination of animal and machinic imagery had been used to stereotype Asian people in the late nineteenth century, but it was directed more towards Chinese immigrants on the West coast. Although Chinese workers had contributed around 80 per cent of the workforce on the transatlantic train route, once it was built, they were portrayed as a people who would undercut the wages of white workers. They were feminised because they were able to take on jobs which involved cooking and cleaning. And they were likened to slaves because they were cheap, exploited labour. They were described as *machines* and as having 'muscles like iron.'²¹ Senator Aaron Sargent compiled a report on Chinese immigration and wrote of how they 'swarm by thousands to our shores like the frogs of Egypt.'²² What the Chinese immigrant shared with black Americans in the eyes of whites was the impossibility of assimilation. By excluding the Asian from American shores, a greater binarism was created, which saw European Americans as a homogeneous whole contrasted against a non-white threat made up of a range of nationalities and ethnicities.

During World War II, though, the methods which were used to manage public opinion regarding the Japanese differed from the approach taken towards the European enemies in two significant and connected ways. First, when it came to Germany and Italy, their peoples were, for the most part, seen as falling victim to a tyrannous regime, and particularly a charismatic, dictatorial leader. There were claims that the Germans were inclined towards notions of racial superiority, but this did not foreclose the possibility of there being good German individuals. But when it came to the Japanese, the popular view was summed up by Admiral William F. Halsey, chief of the Pacific fleet when he expressed satisfaction in the fact that ten Japanese were being killed for every one American and went on to opine that 'The only good Jap is a

¹⁹ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 30.

²⁰ Geiger, *American Documentary Film*, 125.

²¹ Lee, *America for Americans*, 77.

²² Lee, 75.

Jap who has been dead for six months.²³ Linked to this was the idea that the Japanese were a mass. Not only were they incapable of being good, they were not even individualistic in the way that they were evil. Much as Edward Hunter would go on to frame the idealised brainwashed subject, they acted ‘like an insect to its instincts’.²⁴

An official army document, released in 1944, designed to prepare American fighters for what to expect from the enemy, acknowledged how the myths surrounding the Japanese were subject to the most extreme fluctuations. It described how before Pearl Harbor, there had been a ‘disdainful appraisal’ of their abilities and how this became transformed into beliefs that they had ‘almost superhuman attributes’.²⁵ Nevertheless, the same guide did go on to say that the Japanese soldier is ‘an expert at camouflage and delights in deceptions and ruses’.²⁶ As the Pacific War progressed, and its eventual outcome was more apparent, this language of insect- and animal-like behaviour became more prominent. Alongside it were solutions that echoed ways of ridding the world of pests and rodents with discourses pertaining to eradication, extermination, and cleansing. In the same press conference in which Admiral Halsey professed his desire to kill ever more Japanese, he hinted at the mass destruction that would eventually bring the country to surrender. He said that ‘when we get to Tokyo ... we’ll have a little celebration where Tokyo was’.²⁷ At about the same time, the film *The Purple Heart* (1944) concluded with a warning that the Japanese would have their cities burned to the ground and the people would be made to ‘get down on your knees and beg for mercy. This is your war – you wanted it – you asked for it. And now you’re going to get it – and it won’t be finished until your dirty little empire is wiped off the face of the earth!’ Advertisements for RKO’s *Behind the Rising Sun* (1943) went even further, declaring that ‘villainous Japs have simply got to be exterminated! They sell their own daughters! They manhandle captive women! They make war even on babies! They torture helpless men and women! ... and more, and more, and more!’²⁸

²³ ‘Celebration in Tokio Pledged by Adm. Halsey’, *San Francisco Examiner*, 7 January 1944, 3.

²⁴ Hunter, *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied It*, 309.

²⁵ ‘Soldier’s Guide to the Japanese Army’ (Military Intelligence Service, War Department, 15 November 1944), 1, <https://ia600301.us.archive.org/28/items/SoldiersGuideToTheJapaneseArmy>.

²⁶ ‘Soldier’s Guide to the Japanese Army’, 11.

²⁷ ‘Celebration in Tokio Pledged by Adm. Halsey’, 3.

²⁸ Geiger, *American Documentary Film*, 130.

This desire for total annihilation of the Japanese was common among those fighting the war. Around half of soldiers asked in 1943 expressed the conviction that the only solution to the conflict was the extermination of the Japanese. Although not as prevalent back home, around 12 per cent still believed that all Japanese would have to be destroyed to bring about peace. This view only increased with the dropping of the atomic bombs in August 1945. Polls showed that just under a quarter of Americans wished that more could have been used before the Japanese had been given the chance to surrender.²⁹ The racial aspect of this is highlighted by the fact that it was never seen as necessary to think of unleashing the same kind of attack on Germany. Terrible assaults took place on German cities with sizeable loss of lives, but this was seen as a tactic to bring an end to the war rather than as the beginning of the total annihilation of a country's population. Captain H.L. Pence of the US Navy was clear about the racial dimension of the war on Japan, declaring that their total annihilation was necessary as the survival of 'white civilisation' was at stake.³⁰

Know Your Enemy: Japan

In Chapter 4, we heard the frustrations voiced by producer Walter Wanger over what he regarded as the uninformed interference of people working within the OWI. Wanger had Lowell Mellett, who headed the Bureau of Motion Pictures, particularly in mind because his experience was in the newspaper rather than the movie business. But one of the main reasons Mellett felt it was necessary to have some control over the output of Hollywood was because of the extreme racist nature of some of the films emerging that included portrayals of Japanese people.³¹ In the summer of 1942, Twentieth Century-Fox had released *Little Tokyo, USA*. This movie portrayed Japanese Americans as a homogeneous group, faking assimilation into American society, and motivated by a 'robotic allegiance' to their Japanese homeland and its emperor. The movie's hero refers to them as 'an Oriental Bund' who are 'getting ready to tear us apart'.³²

²⁹ Dower, *War without Mercy*, Chapter 3: War Hates and War Crimes.

³⁰ Akira Iriye, *Power and culture: the Japanese-American war, 1941 - 1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 123.

³¹ Harris, *Five Came Back*, 206.

³² Harris, 162. Mellett's warnings over the possible damage this might do were paid little heed and as late as 1945, Raoul Walsh's *Objective Burma* contained references to 'monkeys', 'slope heads', 'degenerate moral idiots', and 'stinking little savages'.

This problem was not exclusive to fiction. The film closest to the army and the intelligence services was *Know Your Enemy: Japan*, which was plagued by such issues from its inception; racial stereotyping was one of the main reasons that the film was so long delayed. The first script for the film was drafted in June 1942 and the film was eventually released on 9 August 1945, three days after the Americans had dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. This changed things so dramatically that General MacArthur cabled Washington to demand that the film should not be shown. MacArthur got his way, and the film was subsequently suppressed for more than thirty years.³³ In fact, the production was so long in the making that a similar documentary made it to the screens during the process. *Our Enemy – The Japanese* was released in 1943 and told a similar story to the one that would be contained in the army's version. The former US ambassador to Japan, Joseph C. Grew, argued in the film that the Japanese were fanatics with a collective mind that was so primitive it could be thought of as being two thousand years out of date.³⁴

The first full treatment of the film was assigned to Joris Ivens. This aroused the interest of the FBI because during the 1930s Ivens had worked for the Film and Photo League (FPL) and was seen as having socialist aspirations.³⁵ Ivens was Dutch, and before arriving in America in 1936 he had made several films in the Soviet Union. His entry into the US was met with great excitement by most members of the FPL, and his credentials attracted intellectual heavyweights such as Archibald MacLeish, Ernest Hemingway, Dorothy Parker, and Lillian Hellman to give backing to a film designed to draw American support to the Loyalist cause against Franco in Spain. The result was the 1937 film *The Spanish Earth*.³⁶

³³ Harris, 523. The key person behind the decision was General Osborn who had worked closely with Capra and was Chief of the Morale Branch of the War Department. McBride, *Frank Capra*, 499.

³⁴ Geiger, *American Documentary Film*, 130.

³⁵ The Film and Photo League (originally called the Workers Film and Photo League) was a New York centred group of photographers and filmmakers who sought to use film and photography to effect social change. For an overview, see Russell Campbell, 'Film and Photo League: Radical Cinema in the 30s', *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 14 (1977): 23–25. For a more contextual account of the group and its place in the wider canon of film, see Robé, *Left of Hollywood*., especially the first two chapters.

³⁶ Geiger, *American Documentary Film*, 112.

The whole nine months that Ivens worked on the *Know Your Enemy* script was carried out under the surveillance of the FBI. The bureau might have also been interested in his screenwriter. Carl Foreman would go on to write screenplays for a number of films sympathetic to civil rights, including the first of the race cycle of films of 1949, *Home of the Brave*. In 1951 he would be forced into exile in Great Britain after being blacklisted in America for alleged communist sympathies. Ivens and Foreman assembled a script which portrayed the emperor Hirohito and a small cabal of industrialists and politicians as entirely responsible for Japanese aggression and military ambition. They even hoped that the Japanese people might see the eventual film – or that its message would find its way to them – and that this might spark a revolt against a corrupt system. However, the OWI were convinced that any peace was best negotiated with Hirohito having some role to play, and so Capra was forced to look elsewhere for development of the original script.³⁷

Allen Rivkin was brought in after Ivens left, and this adaptable scriptwriter also bemoaned the difficulty of working on a script that left space open for dealing with Hirohito on a collaborative basis. After this, Irving Wallace (then a journalist, in the future a novelist) was recruited, and he was particularly frustrated by Capra, convinced that he was politically unsophisticated and hampered by a simplistic, binary approach to understanding the Japanese and foreign policy. He remembers discussions with Foreman in which they despaired of the racist direction Capra was taking the film.³⁸ The script went through several more iterations, each of which struggled to achieve the desired tone towards the Japanese, before landing with Capra's directing colleague John Huston. Showing little enthusiasm for the project, he delivered a script that was at least as racist as any of those previously rejected on just those grounds. He concluded that no compromise was possible with Japan and that the country would have to be destroyed in order to make a fresh start. The first response which came back from the army was that he had been too sympathetic in his portrayal of the Japanese people. Such a hard-line reaction can be seen as an indication of the developing conviction that wholesale destruction of Japanese cities, and the

³⁷ Harris, *Five Came Back*, 277. The OWI did not keep such advice and constraints confined to its own productions. It also advised United Artists that the film *Blood on the Sun* should tone down its portrayal of Hirohito and lay the blame for the war with figures underneath him. Harris, 375.

³⁸ McBride, *Frank Capra*, 498.

slaughter of their populations, would be the best way to force a surrender. If this was to take place, it was counterproductive to have a film eliciting any sliver of sympathy for the future victims. It was at this point that Capra decided to complete the project himself.³⁹

As the film was withdrawn from use, it cannot be said to have inured the American viewer to the forthcoming atrocities unleashed on Japan. It can nevertheless be viewed as material which had this purpose in mind. To picture the Japanese as interchangeable, as accepting of their fate, as seeing death as more honourable than surrender, was to make the destruction of cities more palatable. Even without the atomic armoury, the bombing sorties directed on cities were devastating in themselves. Tokyo was targeted with mass bombings leading to the death of more than a hundred thousand civilians and more than a million being left without homes. If the image that the American people had of the Japanese was of an incalculably cruel race which operated more like an ant colony than a modern society, then such carnage could be seen as the only realistic way to treat the problem. As John Dower argues, the Japanese were only ever seen as subhuman or superhuman. Passing from one to the other and back again involved no transition where they became human and could be seen as worthy of empathy and help.⁴⁰ This is not to say that there was not great cruelty perpetrated by the Japanese during the war, but that the evocation of them as being irredeemably brutal – without the same room for good individuals granted to the Germans and Italians – was to approach them in a definitively racialised manner.⁴¹

Know Your Enemy: Japan confirmed the repeated mantra that the Japanese were a mass, offering the striking analogy of ‘photographic prints off the same negative’. There was essentially a single mind at work, and to gain control of this was to be able to control the actions of the mass. This is made clear in the first scenes of the film, where the narrator Walter Huston states that ‘we shall never completely understand the Japanese mind but they don’t understand ours either’. The reason ‘they’ will not understand ‘our’ mind is because the latter is individual and not in awe of authority.

³⁹ Harris, *Five Came Back*, 337. He also had help from Theodore Geisel, more popularly known as Dr Seuss.

⁴⁰ Dower, *War without Mercy*, Chapter 5: Lesser Men and Supermen.

⁴¹ See Dower for graphic accounts of some of the cruelties perpetrated but also of how some American troops went out of their way to match them.

The film claims that all developments in America have come from the people, whereas in Japan they have been forced on the people. The strong claim of the film is that Japan has been run for a long time by a small group of militarists who have been using the role of the emperor to command totally and brutally, with the emperor himself little more than a totem.

The film makes two connected claims about the Japanese: that they are a strange mix of racial influences which inclines them towards superstition, cruelty, double-dealing, and submissiveness; and that the warlords have channelled these instincts towards war through a structure of constant drilling and thought control. Playing on American fears of miscegenation it declares that the Japanese are ‘a well-mixed plasma cocktail of Ainu, Mongol, Manchu, and Malaysian.’



Figure 3: The 'well-mixed plasma cocktail' of Japanese in *Know Your Enemy: Japan* (1945).

Huston goes on to say that the Japanese ‘has been trained to be a soldier almost from birth. And into his tough little mind has been drilled and hammered the fanatical belief that the Japanese are descendants of Gods.’ He follows the flag in ‘a blind emotional rush’. Meanwhile, the women are ‘human machines producing rice and soldiers.’ The script does not want to let the people off entirely but lays the blame firmly

with the warlords. It squares this circle by saying that the Japanese are ‘willing prisoners of a vicious iron-clad structure’, and accept their fate in ‘dumb regimented silence’. The effectiveness of the structure is strengthened by the presence of ‘thought police’, as well as millions of spirits who are on constant watch for betrayal of the emperor. The education system is geared towards producing submissive, unquestioning beings. Schools teach ‘officially selected facts’ which ‘mass produce students who all think alike’. They are like ‘a sponge absorbing water’ and, like a sponge, only the same water is given back. The aim is to ‘hammer, knead, and mould the whole population until it becomes an obedient mass, with but a single mind.’ And because they are taught that they are all part of the same family, those Japanese who go abroad are most likely doing so as agents, disguised as flower-sellers, fishermen, tourists or barbers – strange barbers who only listen and do not talk – soaking up information for the benefit of Tokyo.



Figure 4: The thought-police and spirits see everything in *Know Your Enemy: Japan* (1945).

The film ends with a hypnotic montage effect with Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* as musical accompaniment. It shows truly shocking images of dead infants to counteract the Japanese mantra of ‘co-prosperity, peace, enlightenment’.⁴² The film concludes that

⁴² It is beyond the scope of this study, but an exploration of the mental impact of some of the horrific images that were presented on screens, on which people had previously experienced

defeating Japan forever is ‘as necessary as shooting down a mad dog in your neighbourhood.’

The methods which are used here by the Japanese warlords on the people share many features of those that would be allegedly employed by the Chinese and Koreans on American prisoners. There is a grim determination on the part of the captors to get a job done because they have fallen under a hypnotic spell. This has been the result of a rigid education and military drilling. There is a culture of confession, and the encouragement of a feeling of being under constant supervision. There is also the idea that the miscegenated nature of the Japanese subject is one which has made them weak and vulnerable to being controlled. It was this final feature that at the time was seen as something to which Americans would not succumb. The allegation that they did – and in significant numbers – in Korea necessitated the creation of a new form of coercion known as brainwashing. It also produced connected allegations of a new American softness.

Our Job in Japan

General MacArthur had urged that *Know Your Enemy: Japan* should not be seen by American troops. He also ordered that the film *Our Job in Japan* (1945) should be shelved. Carl Foreman – who had worked on earlier drafts of *Know Your Enemy: Japan* – wrote the script alongside Theodore Seuss Geisel. The film went further than *Know Your Enemy: Japan* in laying the blame for aggression with the military and portraying the Japanese people as a pliant empty vessel into which new thoughts could easily be poured. It was the final film made by Capra’s unit and was not released until 1982.⁴³ The partnership of Foreman and Geisel was an unlikely one. Foreman had found it difficult to deliver a suitable script for the film *Know Your Enemy: Japan* because of his refusal to show culpability as an innate aspect of the Japanese character, whereas Geisel had drawn a cartoon which explicitly portrayed the Japanese as a fifth-column; Geisel had also been a supporter of the internment of Japanese-Americans during the war.

entertainment, would be interesting. Although this film did not reach the public, there were many other newsreels and documentaries that did share shocking images from the front.

⁴³ McBride, *Frank Capra*, 499.

Theodore Geisel was better known by a version of his middle name, Dr Seuss, and would go on to become one of the most successful authors of children's books, responsible for *The Cat in the Hat*, *Green Eggs and Ham*, *The Grinch*, and many others. At this point, he was best known for his political cartoons in the newspaper *PM*. His contributions were meant to steel resolve for the war; part of this involved the dehumanisation of the enemy and the abandonment of any notion of a brotherhood of man, at least for the duration of the war. A cartoon that Seuss published on 13 January 1942 elicited a mixed response from readers, with some despairing of its negative portrayal of anyone with pacifist leanings. In response, Seuss wrote: 'I believe in love, brotherhood and a cooing white pigeon on every man's roof ... But right now, when the Japs are planting their hatchets in our skulls, it seems like a hell of a time for us to smile and warble: "Brothers!" It is a rather feeble battlecry.'⁴⁴

Seuss had produced cartoons prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor that showed an impatience and ridicule of racism that sits very oddly with the viciously racist representations of the Japanese that he produced during the war. In one such cartoon we see the Japanese presented as a pack of cats, none of them very dangerous in themselves but acting as a mass they are a nuisance, something to be rid of. This interchangeability of animal tropes means that we are just as likely to see the Japanese as rats or cats, or monkeys, or ants. Whatever they are, they will have the supposed Japanese features of slant-eyes and buck-teeth.

⁴⁴ Richard H. Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel* (New York; San Diego, CA: New Press; Published in cooperation with the Dr. Seuss Collection at the University of California, San Diego, 2001), 184.

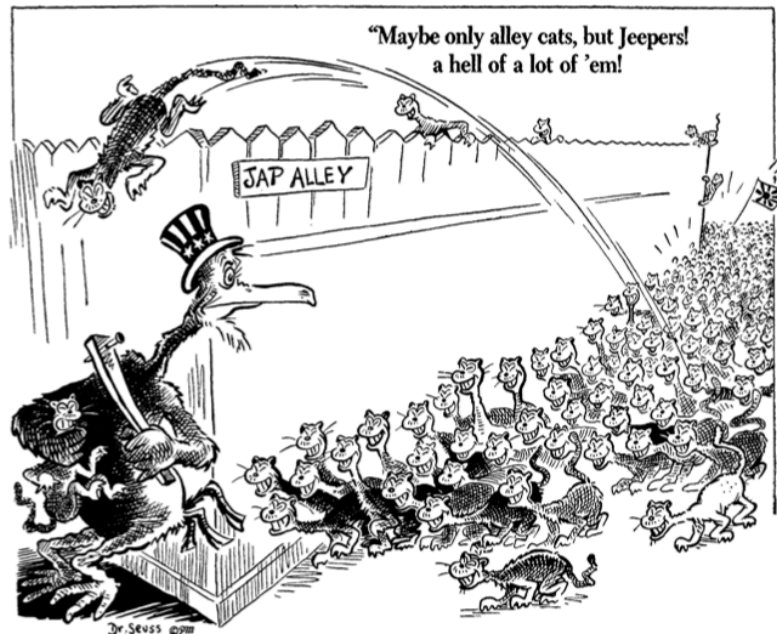


Figure 5: Theodor Geisel cartoon showing Japanese as cats.

Interestingly, in the second of the cartoons, we see Hitler looking like a fairly ordinary white man, if a little over proud and prissy. In contrast, his Japanese wife is a grotesque creature, with pig-like features. The child who is the product of their union is even more monstrous, with webbed feet indicating that the Japanese heritage has been dominant. This is also indicated by the name of Hashimura, ironically thus supporting Nazi ideas – and those of American eugenicists such as Stoddard and Grant – about the degeneration of the races brought about through miscegenation.



Figure 6: Theodor Geisel cartoon showing Japanese-German offspring.

Geisel went through several transformations in his approach to the Japanese, and there are indications that he always regarded his portrayal of them as being the means to an end. The psychiatrist John Appel recalls how he spent time with the filmmakers working on Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* project and remembered well the presence of 'Dr Seuss'. One of the lessons passed on by the psychiatrist was that the filmmakers would maximise the effectiveness of the soldier if they could arouse his emotions, his fear, and his anger by appealing to the id.⁴⁵

Geisel also drew cartoons recommending a flushing out of racist ideas that offer a mental model similar to that first put forward by Edward Hunter and Robert Guillain with their reports from Red China, when undesirable thoughts were removed from the brains of recalcitrant communist subjects. In this case, it is a bug that is shown as having found a way into the brain which has resulted in an infection of the mind.

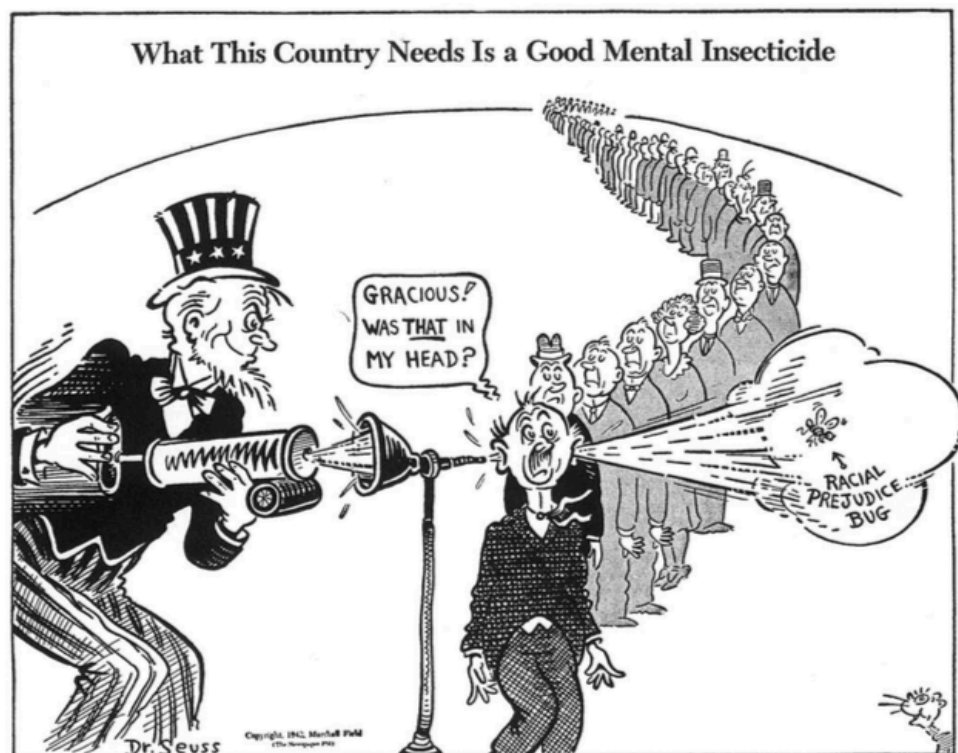


Figure 7: Theodor Geisel cartoon on the racial prejudice bug.

⁴⁵ John W. Appel, 'Fighting Fear', *American Heritage* 50, no. 6 (October 1999): 22.

We'll Have to Clean a Lot of Stuff Out Before We Put Peace Thoughts In!

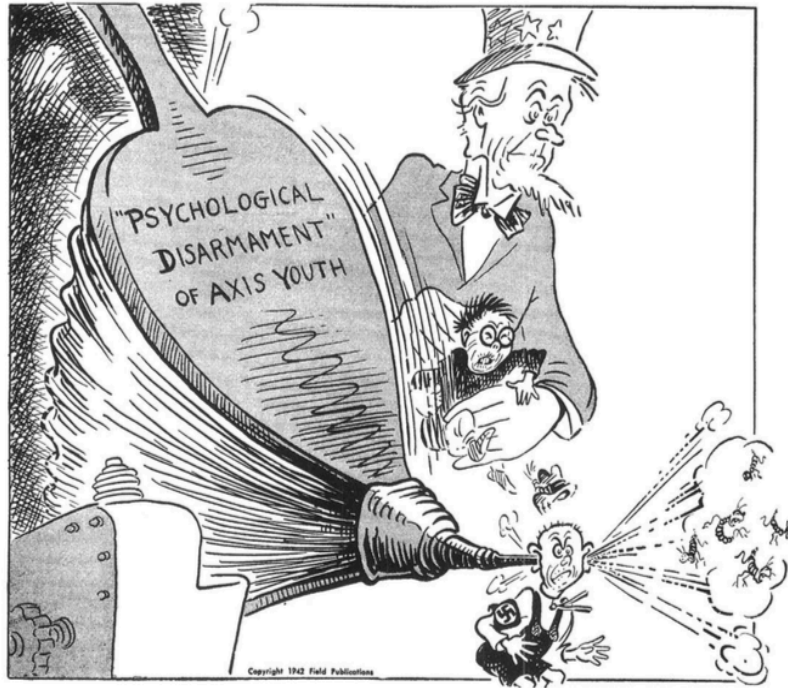


Figure 8: Theodor Geisel cartoon showing the cleansing of a Nazi brain.

In fact, in the film which Geisel made with Foreman, it is this idea of polluting the Japanese mind that is used to indicate that the people themselves were not really responsible for what went on in the country. The filmmakers suggest that it was the Shinto religion that was used to ‘muddle the Japanese mind’. They claim that Shintoism was able to make the war and the carnage that went with it desirable because it deployed a mix of ancient myths, nightmares, and ‘mumbo-jumbo’ to steer the people down a particular path. This was married with an enforcement of drilling and repetition, which is replicated in the film with a refrain of ‘Make them bow, make them say it’ and ‘Drill the schoolkids, drill the bank clerks, drill the farmers.’

The film insists that the Japanese can play a productive role in the new, better world which is promised in the film’s opening. There are two main reasons offered for this. One is because of the strength of Japanese family ties which is emphasised throughout the film, and particularly the ‘clean slate’ of Japanese children. This contrasts with *Know Your Enemy: Japan*, which shows family loyalty as a reason for suspecting anyone abroad as a spy. The narration of *Our Job in Japan* insists that no child was ever born with a bad idea, and that these can only be learned. Positioning America as being like an older brother, and the Japanese still somewhat primitive, the job of America in

Japan is to make sure that sensible ideas are put inside Japanese heads. This is the second reason why the Japanese are presented as hopeful vessels of democracy: because, as the war has proven, and the film sets out to demonstrate, they are easily influenced and act as a mass. 'Our problem', states the narrator, 'is in the brain of the Japanese head. There are seventy million of them in Japan. Made of the same stuff as ours, they can do good things or bad things. It all depends on the kind of ideas that are put inside.' Whereas the Japanese are portrayed as now having no discernible traits – although the troops are warned to look out for tricksters and to slap them down if encountered – all the Americans need to do in order to carry out their jobs is to 'be ourselves'. Now that the Japanese people are free of the 'thought police', they can look to the Americans as role models, and it is part of the American character to 'give a fair break to everybody regardless of race or creed or colour'. It is at this point that we see the only black faces in the film.

Behind the Rising Sun

It is tempting to exaggerate the importance of government-backed films such as *Know Your Enemy: Japan*. As historical sources they carry with them a rich story of agency battles, backed up by archival records; they also contain real documentary footage and a strong visual style. Likewise, it is easy to underplay the significance of industry films, often made to exploit the commercial possibilities offered by the war, and long since dismissed for their limited aesthetic value. The fact remains that the public did not see – nor did the army troops as events turned out – either of the orientation films mentioned earlier. By contrast, two low-budget films that were set in Japan – *Behind the Rising Sun* (1943) and *First Yank into Tokyo* (1945) – were seen in significant numbers. There is scant record of what the viewers thought about the films or how they were affected by them, but something about them attracted the public. By working through the discursive context in which the films were made and distributed, we may learn more about prevailing ideologies than through more intellectually weighty but socially ephemeral archival sources. A documentary with higher production values and a considered narrative can lead to crucial delays. Commercial films such as these were running to tight schedules – *First Yank into Tokyo*'s director Gordon Douglas was at the helm of 20 films between the end of the war and 1952 – so

they can be less mediated, even if that means they can also contain contemporary stereotyping which time and consideration might have led to being edited out.⁴⁶

The two films share many features, from the general racial stereotyping to the specific device of lead characters who have been schooled in America and lived in Japan. This section focuses on three commonalities: Tom Neal plays the lead male role in both films and helps us consider what it means to take on the guise of another nationality; the idea that filial and national loyalties are ingrained and will override education and acquired culture; the claim made in both movies for the reliability of film as a means of uncovering the truth. There is a further link between the two films which has a quite sinister feel when the two films are watched together. *Behind the Rising Sun* ends with its most sympathetic characters pleading with the Americans to destroy Japan. The main character's fiancée stays in Japan expecting to die for a country not yet born; his father begs: 'Destroy us as we have destroyed others. Destroy us before it is too late.' *First Yank into Tokyo* ends with a celebration of the recently released atomic weapons, destroying Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The narrator declares: 'Hiroshima! Destroyed! Nagasaki! Devastated! As surely as they had disappeared into dust, no more Allied soldiers will fall. Mankind can again walk unafraid in peace and goodwill toward men.'

The first of Tom Neal's roles was in *Behind the Rising Sun*. He plays Taro Seki, son of Reo Seki (J. Carroll Naish), the wealthy head of a respectable family and loyal to the government. In *First Yank into Tokyo*, Neal plays an American patriot, Steve, who undergoes transformative plastic surgery that will make him appear Japanese for the rest of his life.

⁴⁶ Douglas was not an untalented director. He made three interesting films noir in *Walk a Crooked Mile* (1948), *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* (1950), and *Between Midnight and Dawn* (1950). He captured something of the paranoia of the time in *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951) and *Them!* (1954). His prodigious output meant that his qualities only came through intermittently. As he told fellow director Bertrand Tavernier, 'I have a large family to feed, and it's only occasionally that I find a story that interests me.' Dave Kehr, 'Portraits of Antisocial Individualism', *New York Times*, 29 August 2013.



Figure 9: Tom Neal in Hollywood make-up in *Behind the Rising Sun* (1943).



Figure 10: Tom Neal in plastic surgery in *First Yank into Tokyo* (1945).

Neal was a staple in B-movies in the late 1940s (particularly memorable in the Edgar Ulmer noir *Detour* (1945)) and his restricted range is in line with both of the roles he is playing here. The film theorist Karla Rae Fuller suggests that his performance in the later film could be a direct result of the heavy make-up he is wearing, but he is supposed to feel literally ‘out of place’ in his skin.⁴⁷ His discomfort is compounded by the idea that Americans are meant to find it difficult to be anything but themselves, that Americanness is not a role that can be donned at will but a perfect evocation of an inner identity. Steve’s look is the look of a hypnotised subject, not unlike that of the airmen making their confessions of germ warfare in Korea.

Behind the Rising Sun, also known as *The Mad Brood of Japan*, was a cheap RKO production which proved to be a box-office hit, grossing \$1.5 million on its \$240,000

⁴⁷ Karla Rae Fuller, *Hollywood Goes Oriental: CaucAsian Performance in American Film*, Contemporary Approaches to Film and Television Series (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 167.

production costs.⁴⁸ The film was advertised with lurid posters which played on stereotypes of Japanese cruelty and lust. The director, Edward Dmytryk was following up the equally successful *Hitler's Children* (1942), for which he had also teamed up with the screenwriter Emmet Lavery, and which contained its own sensational images.⁴⁹



Figure 11: Promotional poster for *Behind the Rising Sun* (1943).

⁴⁸ 'Top Grossers of the Season', *Variety*, 5 January 1944, 54.

⁴⁹ During the HUAC hearings of 1947, Lavery would be called to give evidence and was accused of having deep sympathy for the communist movement or else being amazingly stupid. The HUAC proceedings have been written about extensively. Ceplair and Englund's thorough contextualising account is an invaluable source. Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930–60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003). See also Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Show Trial: Hollywood, HUAC, and the Birth of the Blacklist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

It is noticeable how much darker the Japanese soldier holding a white woman has been made to appear. This darkening of the skin has been a feature of other attempts to literally “blacken” a group of people.⁵⁰ It is not as immediately apparent that the background figures have been made to look more like savages lunging with spears and swinging clubs. The women also have hairstyles that make them look more American than Japanese.

The film tells the story of Taro Seki, who has been educated in America at Cornell University and returns to Tokyo in 1937, having absorbed American culture and values. He meets his father with a ‘Gee, Pop’ and hums American pop songs as he showers. He questions the Japanese insistence on family status as the major consideration in marriage. The film shows Taro gradually reacquiring more stereotypical Japanese traits as he is conditioned back into the country’s culture, particularly after he is enlisted into the army and serves in China. Initially he turns a blind eye to the cruelties around him, but soon he is separating mothers from their children so that the women can be held as sex slaves. This is a firm parallel with the process shown in *First Yank into Tokyo*, emphasising that even with an American education and a relish of American culture, once Japan calls there is an inescapable pull towards responding in a military fashion that reverses everything learned in America. This can be read as a justification of the internment of Japanese in America in the first months of the war.

The film comments on race and ethnicity, while at the same time exhibiting some of the swirling confusion around race at the time of its making. None of the actors portraying the leading Japanese characters were Japanese themselves. Tom Neal was American, Margo was Mexican-American, and J. Carroll Naish was Irish-American. But this was also the case for other nationalities, notably the American George Givot playing an amusing Russian newspaperman with an Italian accent. Race is central to the film, with the repeated claim that the reason that the Japanese will rule the world is because the white man is in the minority in global terms and the Japanese see themselves as best placed to lead the non-white races in a global war against them. There are several references to how the Japanese are running a slave society. One

⁵⁰ For an account of its use in nineteenth-century Ireland, see L. Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971).

scene in particular seems to bring together American ideas of racial supremacy and slavery when the journalist Sara Braden (Gloria Holden) is slapped by a Japanese soldier for failing to get out of his way on the sidewalk. It was an expectation of the American South that black people would make way for whites in such situations, and in Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), the film shows that an early indication of the evils of Reconstruction was black people declining to behave in this manner.

In many ways, the film is a subtler production than the posters would have led to expect. In Taro's father Reo, and his fiancée Tama, we are presented with Japanese who question the barbarism that the country is displaying to its enemies. They also show themselves as being friendly and cooperative towards Americans. At the same time, they both welcome the American destruction of Japan as a necessary price for a new beginning. Taro's father decides to take his own life, and declares that Japan must die so that a new country can be born. The film ends with him pleading that the Americans destroy the Japanese as they have destroyed others, and to do it soon, before it is too late. The celebratory ending of *First Yank into Tokyo*, then, can be read as bringing this request into being.

First Yank into Tokyo

The 1945 RKO production *First Yank into Tokyo* (also known as *Mask of Fury*) was made at the point when Japan was being transformed from an enemy to the subject of American rule. The changing circumstances of the war were incorporated into the script, with the release of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki folded into the conclusion of the film as a cause for celebration. The film was originally going to revolve around the rescue of an American prisoner who had crucial knowledge of a new gun but was changed to make him the possessor of vital technical information allowing the release of the bombs. It was the first film to show the use of atomic weapons, and reveals how quickly "B" films such as this can sometimes capture a social and political phenomenon. To refer to the film as a B-movie is to stress its quick production and cheap look. In terms of its distribution and publicity, it received coverage more in line with an A-movie. The film went into production around March 1945 and received its world premiere in San Francisco at the Golden Gate Theatre on 11 September that year. The opening screening was attended by servicemen who had been held as prisoners in Japan, and the actor Dick Powell joined the film's main stars

on the stage of the theatre for a special broadcast.⁵¹ Similarly, when the film opened in Boston the following month, Marjory Adams reported how the RKO Theatre began screenings at 8 a.m. and gave a free breakfast to the first 500 patrons.⁵² Although this film is little known today, its adroitness in being the first to show the atomic bomb in a movie meant that it ‘cleaned up at the box office.’⁵³

Filming had been completed when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August. According to the *Montreal Gazette*, the film had actually started its run, when it was recalled in order to make the most of the opportunity offered by the new bomb. RKO-Radio’s publicity chief Barrett McCormick told a Montreal conference how they realised that ‘right now there was a market for the subject’. If they altered a few scenes that spoke of a gun to become mentions of a bomb, and ended the film with footage of an atomic explosion, they would beat everyone else to the punch.⁵⁴ *Time* magazine said that this material was supplied by the war department and was actually footage of atomic test explosions over New Mexico.⁵⁵ As well as the atomic bomb exploitation angle, the film’s promoters also played up the plastic surgery element. Wisconsin’s *Sheboygan Press* described the difficulties faced by the film’s producers, given that ‘it was out of the question for an American to pose as a Jap’. Limiting the range of those who could pass as American, the article asserted that:

only an American or a European can assume an interchangeable nationality. We are told that the film’s producer, J. Robert Bren contacted a surgeon and was advised that “a plastic surgeon could turn out a quite convincing Jap and intravenous injections could give the skin proper color to go with the face”. The big drawback, according to the physician, would be that “the patient would wear the face of a Jap until he died.”⁵⁶

⁵¹ ‘Premiere of “First Yank” is Held in San Francisco’, *Motion Picture Herald*, 15 September 1945.

⁵² Marjory Adams, ‘New Films: “First Yank Into Tokyo”’, *Boston Globe*, 9 November 1945, 24.

⁵³ Dick Vosburgh, ‘Obituary: Gordon Douglas’, *Independent*, 6 October 1993. Figures not available, but trade papers reported that the makers should be happy with the first box office returns of the movie. ‘The Correct Yank’, *Box Office Digest*, 15 September 1945, 8.

⁵⁴ ‘Atomic Bomb in RKO Film’, *Montreal Gazette*, 13 September 1945, 3. There were some who focused on other aspects of the film in their reviews, such as Byron Brown who classed it as a ‘realistic romantic drama’. Byron Brown, ““First Yank Into Tokyo” Daring Atomic Bomb Feature at Stuart’, *Nebraska State Journal*, 18 November 1945, 26.

⁵⁵ ‘AFI|Catalog – First Yank into Tokyo’, accessed 10 November 2018, <https://catalog.afi.com/Catalog/moviedetails/24408>.

⁵⁶ ““First Yank Into Tokyo” Is Playing at the Rex Theatre’, *The Sheboygan Press*, 2 November 1945, 11.

First Yank into Tokyo tells the story in flashback of how Major Steve Ross (Tom Neal) infiltrates a Japanese prison camp in order to rescue Lewis Jardine (Marc Cramer), a crucial part of the American operation to develop atomic weapons. Ross has been selected for the job because, having been brought up in Japan, he speaks the language fluently. All that is required to pull off the subterfuge is for him to undergo plastic surgery which will provide him with Oriental features. This is an operation which cannot be reversed, meaning that Ross will have 'the face of the enemy' for the rest of his life. Part of the reason that Ross accepts the mission is that he believes his fiancée Abby Drake (Barbara Hale) has been killed in Bataan, and he therefore has little to live for. When he gets to the camp, Ross discovers that Abby is alive and is working there as a nurse. It also turns out that the camp commander, Colonel Hideko Okanura (Richard Loo) was Ross's roommate when the two of them were at college in America. Okanura is blessed with a phenomenal power of recall, and is determined to remember where he has seen Ross before. Ross is eventually exposed through a film of his idiosyncratic thumb-twiddling, but, forming an alliance with a Korean infiltrator Haan-Soo (Keye Luke), the two lay down their lives fighting off Japanese, thus allowing Abby and Jardine to escape. The bombing of Hiroshima is presented as the film's happy ending.



Figure 12: Promotion for screening of *First Yank into Tokyo* (1945).

The film must be read in the context of this ending, confirming that the only reasonable way to end the war with Japan was through a form of extermination. Although it was not the absolute annihilation of the country that many had called for, it was an action that clearly spoke to this reality unless there was total surrender. The message of the film is that the races cannot change, that whatever appearances might indicate, there is an essential nature which overrides everything else. It is a film whose philosophy was in harmony with the decision to intern Japanese Americans. We see this clearly in the different directions taken by Ross and Okanura. Their lives ran in parallel – brought up in Japan and college-educated in America – until war was declared, and then Okanura became a cruel camp commander. Steve remained fair-minded and motivated by bringing peace to the world, but also aware that this meant the Japanese had to be killed.

The attitude of Abby towards Steve when she meets him in his guise as Sergeant Tomo Takashima comes across in the film's narrative as insensitive and dismissive. Despite the fact that he has been polite and helpful to her throughout their interactions, she cannot bring herself to accept that he might be a good Japanese. Abby is presented as the character most able to see things as they really are. It comes as no surprise to

her when Okanura expects sexual favours from her despite formerly acting as her defender. She says at one point that ‘You Japs couldn’t change. You’re all alike. You ought to be put in cages.’ And her instincts are proven correct: there is something odd about Takashima; the fact that the only good Japanese she meets is an American in disguise proves her original thinking to have been sound and her distrust of Steve, in his Japanese guise, well-placed. This contradicts what film theorist Tom Gunning describes the film as doing, when he says that it ‘uncovers that nightmare of every racist: that race is in one sense only skin deep and that the traits on which identity and superiority are founded can be altered’.⁵⁷ The traits of the Japanese male which are shown as universal in this film – cruelty, lust, primitive infantilism, and misogyny – are not acquired by Steve and this is why he leaves Abby feeling uncomfortable. His racial characteristics are only on the surface and both Abby and Okanura see through them.⁵⁸ Japanese traits are linked to the skin and facial features (through blood), Steve’s are merely plastic. To both Abby and Okanura, there is something about Steve that does not look right, his epidermal schema fails to connect to his racial being.

Also, importantly, the film is based on the idea that with the necessary plastic surgery, a white American can impersonate a Japanese, but it is categoric in asserting that Steve will not be able to change back after the operation. In order for him to convince as a Japanese man, certain options must be foreclosed and one of these would seem to be ever having the capacity to take on the role of a white man. This is one of the reasons why it is necessary for Steve to die at the end: so that suggestions of miscegenation between him and Abby can be raised, but abandoned before they become a reality. Placed alongside Steve in his fight against the Japanese is the Korean Haan-soo, and the two of them end the film sacrificing their lives to allow others to escape. Four days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Korean Provisional Government had issued a proclamation to all Koreans, whether at home or abroad, that every measure should be taken to sabotage and kill any legitimate Japanese targets: ‘To fight for America is to fight for Korea.’⁵⁹ At the same time as Haan-soo

⁵⁷ Fuller, *Hollywood Goes Oriental*, xii.

⁵⁸ Such is Okanura’s obsession with Steve, both during college and in the camp, that a homosexual attraction is at least hinted at. Despite Abby getting physically much closer to him, it is Okanura who is able to see the real person underneath the disguise.

⁵⁹ Hye Seung Chung, *Hollywood Asian: Philip Ahn and the Politics of Cross-Ethnic Performance* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006), 116.

fulfils a heroic role, there is an element in his performance of the very attributes that were used by Hollywood to demean and diminish the Oriental character. He acts in ways that draw attention to stereotyped Asian traits of obsequiousness and untrustworthiness, always putting on a performance in a way that shows him to be comfortable donning a mask to fit whatever circumstances present themselves. In contrast, Steve is reliant on the technology of plastic surgery to pull off his subterfuge and always looks uncomfortable in his disguise, doing everything in his power not to draw attention to himself. Haan-soo commands the stage in every scene he is involved in, revelling in playing a role akin to a Shakespearean fool.⁶⁰

When Steve is exposed, it is through the medium of film. What Steve is able to disguise in the moment, film is able to uncover and historicise. When the two former roommates were at college, Okanura recorded Steve in his football games. The combination of seeing Steve's American body in the American setting of American football, along with an individual, idiosyncratic gesture of thumb twiddling when nervous, allows the person on screen to be matched with the infiltrator in the Japanese camp. Film has successfully cut through the surface truth to expose the deeper reality. The analogical referent of the picture cuts across time to find its same point of contact in the room; the person who shot the film as a means of celebrating the actor's Americanness, now projecting the film to expose the falsity of his Japaneseness.

⁶⁰ The propensity of Asians to take on roles and disguises is seen as a racial trait, except when it comes to playing themselves in Hollywood films. Karla Rae Fuller draws attention to how in the announcements of the film *Blood on the Sun* (1945), it was said that Caucasian actors had been chosen to play the Asian roles in the film because 'although there are plenty of Oriental thespians who might pass for Nips ... Orientals don't make good actors.' Fuller, *Hollywood Goes Oriental*, 126.



Figure 13: Film reveals Steve's true identity in *First Yank into Tokyo* (1945).

Taro's identity, too, is exposed through film. In *Behind the Rising Sun* also, there is a remarkable scene in which Taro takes a photograph of children receiving food parcels. The screen is frozen, and the image is then placed in an envelope to be mailed to his fiancée to show her that the Japanese are treating Chinese children well. The film then begins rolling again and we see that the children are actually being given parcels containing opium. The fact that Taro chooses to send the photograph despite becoming aware of the reality behind it is the first solid indication that he has been conditioned by Japanese military training. As the privileged viewer, granted the truth by the film, we are now separated from Taro, who has chosen to align himself with the misleading photographic image. Moreover, this image then crosses boundaries and infiltrates America, contaminating truthful accounts of Japanese atrocities. Film is at once a gateway to the truth, and an ideological and propagandistic tool that in the wrong hands can be deadly.



Figure 14: Photographs showing food parcels handed out in *Behind the Rising Sun* (1943)



Figure 15: Film exposes the truth of the packages in *Behind the Rising Sun* (1943).

Frank Capra and the filmmakers who worked on the *Why We Fight* series always declared that they operated by a 'strategy of truth'. This chapter has shown some of the difficulties that are encountered when such a strategy becomes compromised by racist beliefs and myths. To characterise a people as 'photographic prints off the same negative' was to deny those people any claim to a fundamental individuality for which America was meant to be fighting. To portray them as rats or insects was to declare them as subhuman. Perhaps that is why the army orientation films – more aligned to

the truth – proved so difficult to make or to be shown. And why the feature films, which revel in myth and stereotype, were quickly made and well-received.

If, to the modern critical viewer, all of the films might seem reductive, or even crass, it should be pointed out that they were made in a very different context. Two were made as blatant propaganda, with only their usefulness as indoctrination in mind; the other two were made with this context as a background and were released to commercially exploit the situation. This meant that they buttressed prevailing opinions and prejudices rather than questioning them. In the main, they were films that were designed to play on and foster division rather than to heal differences. In that respect, we are perhaps looking at film in its most negative aspect. But from the same period, we can look at films whose aim was to heal and to overcome prejudice. During World War II, the American military made a raft of films that were concerned to tackle the mental health of its fighting forces and to ease mainland concerns about the return of the mentally injured. These films form the basis of the next chapter.

Chapter 7 – The Return of the Brave

*There'd be no war today,
If mothers all would say,
"I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier."
American Anti-war song.*

This study has so far mainly focused on men in foreign conflicts. It has looked at American prisoners in Korea, and Japanese and German prisoners in America, as well as images of the enemy produced to maximise morale for American troops fighting abroad. This chapter assesses some of the measures which were taken to accommodate the returning American soldier. It looks at the use of film to help assimilate those who had suffered psychologically during the war; it also explores how attitudes towards race were represented in new ways on the movie screen, part of a wider effort to alter social relations and bolster America's standing as a beacon of freedom in an uncertain postwar landscape.

Filming Trauma

The most famous film dealing with the return of mentally scarred soldiers was John Huston's documentary *Let There Be Light* (1946). As important as this film was, it was perhaps of more significance as a film made by one of Hollywood's leading directors, and for its interesting production history, than for any direct effect it had as a healing aid. Before exploring this history, I look at a film that was used as part of the psychiatric training for those medics helping people who had reached a mental breaking point on the battlefield. Such techniques included an often improvised mix of chemicals, psychoanalysis, and hypnosis. The film was *Psychiatric Procedures in the Combat Area* (1944). I will show how scenes from the film were repeated, refined, and repurposed for the making of both *Let There Be Light* and the later *Shades of Gray* (1948).

I suggest that the images of sick black soldiers contributed to the army severely curtailing the distribution of Huston's film, which had been made with the intention of a general release. The army encouraged a remake of *Let There Be Light* made with actors rather than real patients, ostensibly to protect individual privacy and dignity. The resulting film, *Shades of Gray* (1948), erased the black presence that was such a notable feature of Huston's film. It also strongly suggested that the mental problems which many American soldiers had experienced were the result of a badly managed childhood

rather than a natural reaction to the horrors of war. This meant that the future role of psychiatrists would be as important as it had been during the war. In order to reduce the psychiatric casualties in any future war, the profession needed to be involved with schools, hospitals, social services, and industry to ensure that citizens had the mental capacity to be transformed into soldiers should that be required.

Given the imbricated production histories of *Let There Be Light* and *Shades of Gray*, it is natural to consider them comparatively to assess how they represent two clashing psychological approaches.¹ It is more unusual to argue that the film *Home of the Brave* (1949), generally recognised as the first of the wave of ‘social problem’ films exploring issues of race, owes its psychological approach to an elaborate compromise between these two films. The film reinserts the central black presence that was so noteworthy in Huston’s documentary. The black actor James Edwards dominates the fictional movie, but the issues which arise from his skin colour are shown to be problems connected with his own attitudes and responses to the environment. War is shown as a situation which only exacerbates existing prejudices. The figure of the psychiatrist/analyst is presented as the person who, if trusted, can help adjust the deviant or distorted personality to the social norms to which everyone ought to aspire. Such norms were based on the values of white, patriarchal families, and the likely explanation for the psychological suffering of a soldier was a mollicoddling mother and a weak father. By plotting how the figure of the ‘psychoneurotic soldier’ was characterised in war information films through to features such as *Home of the Brave*, we will see how the mooted cause of psychological problems shifted from bombs to moms.

What all of these films clearly show – and this is where they are of particular pertinence to the argument of this thesis – is that during the war, there was already great interest in what changes could be wrought in the attitudes and personality of a person through the use of environmental forces, psychological techniques, and chemical stimulants. The aim of using these methodologies, generally controlled by psychiatrists and psychologists, was to help in the adjustment of soldiers to their new – and for significant numbers, unbearable – environment. Ironically, these techniques

¹ An excellent analysis of the two films, carried out in this manner, has been provided by C.A. Morgan III, and this chapter is indebted to his research. See C.A. Morgan III, ‘From “Let There Be Light” to “Shades of Grey”: The Construction of Authoritative Knowledge about Combat Fatigue (1945–48)’, in *Signs of Life: Cinema and Medicine*, ed. Graeme Harper and Andrew Moor (London; New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), 132–52.

formed the core of the accusations against the Chinese in the original manifestations of brainwashing against Americans. Allegations of widespread use of hypnosis and drugs, dealt out by masters of psychological trickery, were largely unfounded. And yet, such were the methods used, filmed, and celebrated in Huston's film and in several other army productions. For the army, these films aimed to incorporate such techniques into the general suite of treatments for ailing soldiers; for the psychiatric profession, they were evidence of the benefit they could bring to society as a whole if they were placed in the forefront of a programme of social engineering.

The historian of psychiatry Noah Tsika has recently pointed out how the films made about army psychiatry were an attempt to make the internal invisible wounds of the soldiers visible to the viewer.² This thesis has already shown how film has always both promised and denied such a symbiosis of soul and skin. Tsika also stresses how what was filmed was often a re-enactment rather than a recording. To act out the trauma was thought of as the best way to recapture the original event and to be released from its effects.³ This *psychodrama* was developed as a technique by the psychiatrist Jacob Moreno, and was emerging at the same time in the acting profession as "Method Acting",⁴ Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Marilyn Monroe being high-profile exponents.⁵

World War II undoubtedly acted as a catalyst for a raft of psychological experimentation which was then adapted to consolidate the professionalisation of the field in the early postwar years.⁶ However, this chapter also highlights how these experiments were taking place before, and outside of, the war. It shows how the 'psy' sciences were already an eclectic, experimental, loose association of professions and practices to which the war only gave more licence for extending their boundaries. In the most iconic of brainwashing films, *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), the Chinese psychologist who has brainwashed the American soldiers, Yen Lo (Khig Dhiagh),

² Tsika, *Traumatic Imprints*, 12.

³ Tsika, 14.

⁴ Tsika, 128.

⁵ The Actors' Laboratory Theatre, which was where many of the stars practised, was also high on the list of FBI targets for suspected communist infiltration. See Laurence Senelick, ed., *Theatre Arts on Acting*, Routledge Theatre Classics (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), 257–60.

⁶ Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States*, Chapter 11.

offers direction to notetakers in the audience. He says that if they doubt the power of hypnotism to force subjects to carry out acts which they find morally objectionable, they should consult three American works: 'Brenman's paper, "Experiments in the Hypnotic Production of Antisocial and Self-Injurious Behaviour", or Wells' paper which was titled, I believe, "Experiments in the Hypnotic Production of Crime". Or, of course, Andrew Salter's remarkable book, "Conditioned Reflex Therapy...". Director John Frankenheimer has described how he and screenwriter George Axelrod 'consulted every book written about brainwashing' in their preparations for making the film.⁷ How significant, then, that the three works Yen Lo highlights as key to research on producing a "Manchurian Candidate" were written in America in the decade before the term brainwashing had entered the language.⁸ And how interesting that none of them were directly associated with the American war effort.

Hypnosis, Drugs, and Psychoanalysis

The psychiatry that was carried out on the battlefield was varied; but it included as part of its repertoire, a severely curtailed and improvised form of psychoanalysis. In 1950, a group of psychoanalysts compiled a thorough literature of psychiatric procedures that had been used on the battlefield. They acknowledged how the war had provided 'a wide variety of situations [that] was an open sesame for the psychoanalytically trained medical officer.'⁹ It should be remembered that the psychiatrists' brief was to return patients to the frontline in a matter of days or weeks, not the months or years that treatment would take for civilians receiving psychiatric help.¹⁰ The principal training centre for turning medical recruits into psychiatrists was Mason General on Long Island – where Huston's documentary would be filmed – and

⁷ Gerald Pratley, *The Films of Frankenheimer: Forty Years in Film* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1998), 40.

⁸ Wells 1941, Brenman 1942, and Salter 1949. See W.R. Wells, 'Experiments in the Hypnotic Production of Crime', *Journal of Psychology* 11 (1941): 63–102. Margaret Brenman, 'Experiments in the Hypnotic Production of Anti-Social and Self-Injurious Behaviour', *Psychiatry: Journal of the Biology and Pathology of Interpersonal Relations* 5, no. 1 (February 1942): 49–61. Andrew Salter, *Conditioned Reflex Therapy* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1949).

⁹ William H. Dunn et al., 'Psychoanalysts in World War II', *Bulletin of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 6S (1950): 1. See this for the comprehensive bibliography of material recording these practices.

¹⁰ Alison Winter, 'Film and the Construction of Memory in Psychoanalysis, 1940–1960', *Science in Context* 19, no. 1 (March 2006): 115.

the training took place over 12 weeks, delivering what the Army psychiatrist Roy Grinker referred to as ‘90-day wonders’.¹¹

The battlefield itself generated an atmosphere that encouraged experimentation, and a desire to find artificial means of producing the kind of altered states that seemed conducive to psychiatric work. Various types of drug were employed as accessories. One of the most popular was sodium pentothal, which came into use when Grinker and his colleague John Spiegel discovered a large quantity in a North African warehouse and decided to experiment with it. The state it produced in recipients led them to develop the process which became known as ‘narcosynthesis’. Various manifestations of this procedure were portrayed in most of the military films examining the recovery of mentally injured soldiers.¹² These films in turn acted as training materials for new recruits to the medical services.

Historian of science Alison Winter suggests that medical staff encouraged patients to think of the experience they had under the drug as replaying a movie in the mind. This movie would work like a flashback and, with the help of the doctor acting the part of a director, it would reproduce the traumatic experience that was causing the mental suffering. This reproduction would carry the verisimilitude of a filmed experience rather than the interpretive material of the dream. The process of reliving and relating this experience was known as abreaction, an emotional discharge which allowed for the sharing and projection of an experience in ways similar to the screening of a film.¹³ Winter points out how the memory was like a film, the consulting room was a theatre, and the process of sharing an experience was akin to running a flashback before an amazed audience.¹⁴

¹¹ Winter, 115.

¹² Winter, 116.

¹³ Abreaction is a form of catharsis that was central to early psychoanalytic ideas and particularly to the practice as a “talking cure”. Joseph Breuer’s patient Anna O. was famously reported as shedding herself of her hysterical symptoms through a process of verbal recollection. See Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol.02. (1893–1895). Studies on Hysteria*, ed. James. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press: Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1955), 21–47. For an account which questions the truthfulness of this case study, see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Remembering Anna O: A Century of Mystification* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁴ Winter, ‘Film and the Construction of Memory in Psychoanalysis, 1940–1960’, 118.

The kind of patch-up work which was being carried out here by hastily trained medics close to the field of battle could hardly be described as a project of creating “new men”, which would come to be associated with brainwashing in Korea. At the same time, the language, the procedures, and the future projects it might provoke, can all be considered the first tentative but structured steps towards creating something akin to a “brainwashed” subject – in this case a model soldier, later a model citizen, and then a Cold War citizen-soldier. Winter points out how some of the doctors using the drugs likened them to a ‘mental enema’, permitting a purging of the mental toxicities that had collected inside the mind and allowing them to be replaced with more healthy thoughts. Grinker and Spiegel themselves argued that the drugged state allowed the doctor to take the traumatic memory and help the patient mould it back into the personal narrative in such a way that it would be fully integrated into the ego.¹⁵ This is not so different from the Chinese approach to thought control, with its emphasis on reworking a person’s autobiography so that it could be made to overwrite the story produced by false consciousness. And, of course, it was the psychiatrists’ objective to return the men under their care to war, rather than doing what was necessarily best for them as individuals. So, when we see in one of the films a patient who cannot stand the thought of dead bodies, the obvious course of action would be to take him away from the conflict; instead, the doctors first of all diagnose this as an abnormal reaction, and then pledge to overcome it so that he can be sent back into battle.

Grinker and Spiegel anticipated that sodium pentothal would continue being used after the war. They considered that the drug could assist ‘in brief psychotherapy for a variety of civilian neuroses.’¹⁶ Other techniques which would come to be associated with brainwashing were also used during the war. The authors describe the extensive use of narcosis, or continuous sleep treatment, in some theatres. The psychoanalyst Lawrence S. Kubie had reported excellent results in trials, but Grinker and Spiegel declared that their experience had been negative. They had used combinations of drugs to induce sleep for up to 110 hours and found that ‘the patient looks back on his treatment as days of nightmare-like horror alternating with periods of relief.’¹⁷ These two leading practitioners abandoned the therapy, but it was continued in the postwar

¹⁵ Winter, 127.

¹⁶ Roy R. Grinker and John P. Spiegel, *Men under Stress* (Philadelphia, PA: Blakiston, 1945), 436.

¹⁷ Grinker and Spiegel, 409.

period and would be one of the most common and damaging techniques employed by D. Ewen Cameron, carrying out mind control experiments at McGill University in Montreal, whilst on the payroll of the CIA.¹⁸

Such experimental work augmented, rather than conflicted with, what was taking place in American psychiatry away from the battlefield. The practice was, at this time, particularly eclectic and open to alliances with other professions. Drugs and other aids were also welcomed to make the mind more malleable for the effects of analytic techniques. The Menninger Clinic, based in Topeka, Kansas was an excellent example of this. After the war, this clinic would become one of the best known in the country – with a number of Hollywood stars seeking refuge and treatment there – and the two Menninger brothers who managed it became public figures.¹⁹ The clinic offered a number of treatments ranging from intensive periods of psychoanalysis to drama-therapy, music-therapy, film-therapy, electric shock treatment, insulin treatment, and hypnosis. The latter was a technique that the clinic was particularly keen to develop, and Karl Menninger wrote to the Surgeon General's office in July 1943 to extol the potential uses of hypnosis in the arena of public health. Menninger began by saying that 'There is a general realization on the part of all psychiatrists that present methods of psychotherapy require too much time for their application.' He went on to say that until about two years ago, the clinic – although open-minded about the benefits of hypnosis – had not used it extensively due to a shortage of staff with the necessary skills. That all changed when a researcher joined them from New York with a 'strong natural bent' for hypnosis. Margaret Brenman's experiments 'astonished' Menninger and his colleagues, and they decided that one of their more senior psychoanalysts, Dr Merton Gill should work alongside Brenman and further develop a technique which would be a mix of hypnosis and psychoanalysis. Menninger lists some of the success stories that were put down to the effectiveness of such a combination. These included

¹⁸ See Marks, *The Search for the 'Manchurian Candidate'*, 140–50. Anne Collins, *In the Sleep Room: The Story of the CIA Brainwashing Experiments in Canada* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1997).

¹⁹ See Lawrence Jacob Friedman, *Menninger: The Family and the Clinic*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1990). Walker Winslow, *The Menninger Story* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956). It also features in the 1955 movie *The Cobweb* directed by Vincente Minnelli.

patients who had been found to be quite unresponsive to any form of psychotherapy applied on its own.²⁰

The clinic had already been in touch with the Macy Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, and had been visited by Frank Fremont-Smith and Alan Gregg representing the two organisations, along with Lawrence Kubie of the Committee on War Neuroses of the National Research Council. All three awarded grants to carry on 'this important experimental work.'²¹ Menninger concluded the letter with a request that Dr Daniel Silverman might be permitted to carry out research at the clinic on the use of the electroencephalograph (EEG) in psychiatry, illustrating again how the clinic was keen to embrace a variety of new techniques as potential aids to the business of psychiatry.²²

These links between the clinic and social scientists were extended to the military, as shown by the clinic's experimentation with Auroratone, developed by Cecil Stokes and used in the clinic as well as in army hospitals. Auroratone was an attempt to synchronise music, colour, and movement on a screen. William Menninger described how he had attended a special screening at the Pentagon in 1945 with representatives from the army, stated as being from "Reconditioning". The psychoanalysts A.A. Brill and John Appel also attended. Menninger reported that 'The total effect is a little like the color pictures in a Rorschach.'²³ He also commented on their hypnotic effect. In June, the clinic showed the films to three sets of patients and said that they were best received by the 'disturbed, closed ward patients.' The clinic expressed enthusiasm for carrying out further tests with the cooperation of the War Department.²⁴

The work carried out by Brenman at the clinic, which also had the support of the University of Kansas, was focused on 'the possibility of evoking anti-social or self-

²⁰ Karl. A. Menninger, 'Letter to Surgeon General', 12 July 1943, 1, Professional Papers, Daniel Silverman, Papers of Karl Augustus Menninger, Kansas Historical Society.

²¹ Menninger, 2–3.

²² Menninger, 4. For the results of experiments Silverman carried out on 411 male prisoners using EEG, see Daniel Silverman, 'The Electroencephalogram of Criminals', *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry* 52 (July 1944): 38–42.

²³ William Claire Menninger, 'Memorandum Re Auroratone', 27 February 1945, Auroratone Films 1941–1950, Menninger Foundation Archives.

²⁴ Menninger Clinic, 'Letter to Mr. Cecil Stokes', 22 June 1945, Auroratone Films 1941–1950, Menninger Foundation Archives.

injurious behaviour by the use of hypnosis.²⁵ In a note on the work in progress, Brenman quotes approvingly Kurt Lewin, claiming for the aim of psychology: 'to conquer this continent, to find out where its treasures are hidden, to investigate its danger spots, to master its vast forces, and to utilize its energies.'²⁶ The colonial connotations here are marked, if unintended. In a summary paper further outlining the aims of the research, Brenman states that 'One of the most challenging and potentially useful of the hypnotic techniques is that of experimental "regression".' She relates how her team successfully regressed a 29-year-old woman to the state of an 8-year-old child.²⁷ She concludes that 'the peculiarly strong affective relationship built up between an experimenter and a deeply hypnotized subject makes possible the creation and control of psychological phenomena far stronger than is possible by the use of orthodox laboratory methods.'²⁸

The use of hypnosis, drugs, regression, the purging of unhealthy thoughts, the use of audiovisual effects, and the rebuilding of a healthy consciousness, all came to be strongly associated with brainwashing and Cold War psychological warfare. Practices such as these, from the early 1940s, remind us that experiments were being developed well before the end of the war, and not necessarily in response to the conflict itself. The urgency of the war, and its encouragement of experimentation and improvisation, allowed usually diverse fields to work together to orientate, rejuvenate, and repair its citizens.

Psychiatric Procedures in the Combat Arena

The film *Psychiatric Procedures in the Combat Area* (1944) was released as a War Department film bulletin, produced by the United States Army Pictorial Service,

²⁵ Brenman, 'Experiments in the Hypnotic Production of Anti-Social and Self-Injurious Behaviour', 49. Brenman was supervised at the University of Kansas by J.F. Brown, one of the most prominent members of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, devoted towards the application of psychology to problems of society. Roger Sapsford, ed., *Theory and Social Psychology* (London; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications in association with the Open University, 1998), 33. Brenman was the first of the researchers referenced in the aforementioned scene from *The Manchurian Candidate*.

²⁶ Margaret Brenman, 'Hypnosis Research, Dr Margaret Brenman 1941–1942', 1941, Hypnosis Research, Dr. Margaret Brenman 1941-1942, Menninger Foundation Archives.

²⁷ Margaret Brenman, 'Experimental Application of Hypnosis', *Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science* 46 (10 April 1943): 195.

²⁸ Brenman, 196.

Signal Corps.²⁹ It shares the same kind of techniques employed later in *Let There Be Light* but was not made with the same audience in mind, did not have the same kind of budget or production values, and employed few of the latter's cinematic techniques. Nevertheless, the film contains raw footage of soldiers undergoing treatment for psychoneurotic problems, which is every bit as gripping as that shown in Huston's film. The lack of an intrusive, overly interpretive narrative, such as that provided by Walter Huston, even allows a greater feeling of intimacy and sympathy with the men filmed. The film shows a group of mentally ill men arriving at a camp for rest, recuperation, and psychiatric assistance. It is a setting in which young men are handed over to the command of a group of psychiatrists. These experts then delineate the domain of normality, and experiment with the people under their control. Although the film does show some soldiers recovering sufficiently to return them to the front, it is a more downbeat film than Huston's, conceding that in some cases there is likely to be no cure for the people with the most severe difficulties.

The film is made up of several psychiatric interview sessions, the most harrowing of which is of a young man being given a dose of pentothal to allow him to undergo a bout of chemical hypnosis. He is only semi-coherent and moans and rocks, occasionally throwing out his arms and head. He is asked to relive a recent event when he lost a close friend during battle. The doctors believe that by bringing this experience back into his mind he will be able to recover from the anguish he is feeling as a consequence of it. He remembers being back in the foxhole where his colleague was killed. His memory then moves on to a situation of fighting with some German soldiers, who surrender to them. He says:

Cigarettes. Cigarettes. All yours. I wouldn't give him none. I'll give you the cigarette. Then he wanted to look at our knives. They looked at the knife. I pulled it out and showed it to him. He jumped back. Ooh, ooh.

The psychiatrist directs him away from this psychoanalytically rich terrain to remember what happened after he had been blown out of his foxhole and was defending a ridge. He moves behind him and tells him, 'You're back on the ridge' and

²⁹ It now forms part of the U.S. National Library of Medicine's digital collections and can be viewed at <http://resource.nlm.nih.gov/101704138>.

then shouts, 'Watch out, shell!' The young man cowers and moans. He asks for them to get him out of there and thinks that there is a hole in his head.

This deeply disturbing sequence ends with the young man expressing his wish to go back home and being told that he first needs to get better. The scene is harder to watch than the conversion scenes that we are shown in *Let There Be Light*. The psychiatrists are not as confident and assertive as those in the later film, and there is a sense that they are experimenting as we watch them at work. There is no evidence that the abreactive process which they have taken the soldier through has had a positive effect on him. In Huston's film in contrast, we are shown men who could not walk, who could not speak, and who could not recall who they were, almost miraculously acquiring their missing powers after a short session of hypnosis. Huston did shoot vast quantities of film – around 75 hours for a one-hour film – and may have been able to show the best examples of recovery, but when seen besides the earlier, earthier film, there is something that feels constructed and manufactured about the scenes.

Let There Be Light

The War Department commanded Captain John Huston to make a film on the subject of returning soldiers with psychological problems in May 1945. Huston was instructed that the finished product should achieve three goals: insist on the small number of men affected; remove the stigma attached to those who have been affected; and explain their good chances of being a success in civilian life.³⁰ It is arguable how far the film goes towards achieving the first objective, with an opening statement that: 'About 20% of all battle casualties in the American Army during World War II were of a neuropsychiatric nature.' It then quickly makes the claim that the war could create situations which would stretch the psychic forbearance of any participant. Through the use of an emotive narrative, delivered by the director's father, Walter Huston; an affecting Dimitri Tiomkin score; the understated, clever cinematography of Stanley Cortez; and not least the frank, raw accounts of the men themselves, the film provokes an empathic reaction in the audience, designed to foster acceptance and understanding among the general public.

³⁰ Gary Edgerton, 'Revisiting the Recordings of Wars Past: Remembering the Documentary Trilogy of John Huston', *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 33.

Unfortunately, there is little concrete evidence of the public reaction as the film was never viewed in a public theatre until 1980 because the War Department refused to permit the general release of the film. Noah Tsika has unearthed valuable evidence to counter the generally accepted idea that the film went unseen by the public. He shows how the film received well-attended multiple screenings in Minnesota, and relates how the Signal Corps sent out a memorandum worrying about the condition of a print because it had been so well borrowed.³¹ Tsika makes an invaluable contribution to resurrecting what he terms Foucauldian ‘popular memory’ from this period: the films that were screened outside of the movie theatre, in ‘classrooms, churches, factories, offices, town squares, and elsewhere’.³² It is important, as Tsika shows, that films made during the war dealing with trauma had a long afterlife, in teaching, industry, and on early television screens. Nevertheless, the fact that the War Department did restrict the release of the film is significant. Ostensibly, the reason for the restriction was because the patients in the film had not signed waivers permitting their images to be shown in the public realm. The War Department had no desire to obtain such waivers from these ‘mental cases’, as they were described by Under Secretary of War, Kenneth C. Royall in a letter to Arthur L. Mayer. Royall said that neither ‘the individuals nor their families should be subjected to any form of pressure’ because this would be ‘an invasion of the right of privacy’ and ‘constitute a breach of faith’.³³ William C. Menninger also sent a letter to Huston himself, which, while praising the film as a ‘wonderful picture’, indicates that he agreed that it should only be released to ‘professional groups’.³⁴

The army historian Charles Morgan constructs a convincing case that Huston’s film fell victim to an internecine struggle for control of the psychiatric profession in the postwar world. He argues that Menninger, fresh from his role as Director of the Psychiatry Consultants Division in the office of the Surgeon General of the Army – and promoted to Brigadier General for his efforts – was influential in ensuring that the film did not receive a general release. What was shown in *Let There Be Light* was an

³¹ Tsika, *Traumatic Imprints*, 30–31.

³² Tsika, 31.

³³ Kenneth C. Royall, ‘Letter to Mr. Arthur L. Mayer’, 9 September 1946, John Huston Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

³⁴ William Claire Menninger, ‘Letter to Mr. John Huston’, 28 March 1946, John Huston Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

account of what could be done to heal people made sick by the ravages of war. In its introductory text, the film declares that although the treatments the viewers will see have proved beneficial on the battlefield, ‘equal success is not to be expected when dealing with peacetime neuroses which are usually of a chronic nature.’ Morgan argues that for individuals such as Menninger, it was imperative that the role of psychiatry was not confined to helping those only in extreme situations such as war. Psychiatrists sought to craft an account of an ill-prepared population of young men being sent to war lacking the mental fortitude that a psychoanalytically attuned society would have provided. If America was to be better prepared for future conflicts, it needed to put the psychological professions in the forefront of public services and public funding.³⁵ Therefore, at the same time as Menninger was praising Huston’s film and bemoaning the fact that it could not obtain permission(s) from the War Department for public screenings, he was actively promoting a revised version of the film which would tell a scripted story, far more in line with the postwar aims of the military and the psychiatric professions. This film, *Shades of Gray*, will be discussed more fully later in the chapter.

There were several reasons why the army could have been unsatisfied with Huston’s film. The repeated refrain of ‘every man has his breaking point’ when that breaking point was located in serving for the military could have provoked fears about claims for compensation payments. This could have been exacerbated by the upbeat ending of the film, where the men were shown making – or being well on the way to making – full recoveries. If a soldier was so severely traumatised that he could not be helped, this would indicate that he had either been pushed beyond endurance or had not received effective treatment towards his recovery. Equally, they may not have liked the images of vulnerability and weakness that were central to the film, preferring to have the American soldier portrayed as more of a warrior. John Huston believed that this was at least partly the reason: to maintain the myth ‘which said that our American soldiers went to war and came back all the stronger for the experience, standing tall and proud for having served their country well.’³⁶ The extensive presence of black patients may also have generated apprehension, given that the army was segregated and Kenneth Royall was strongly opposed to changing this.³⁷

³⁵ Morgan III, ‘From “Let There Be Light” to “Shades of Grey”’, 139–41.

³⁶ John Huston, *An Open Book* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 125.

³⁷ Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces*, 166.

Although one of the most notable features of *Let There Be Light* was the prominence it gave to the travails of black soldiers, it only went so far in giving them a voice. The first extended interview, and one of the film's most memorable sequences, is when a black soldier breaks down and has to be called back to relate what has made him so upset. He tells the psychiatrist that he has found it very difficult to be apart from his 'sweetheart', partly because of the strength she gives him in working through any problems. He says that 'we were able to surmount so many obstacles', and this is where the film cuts to the next scene. If he was about to discuss racism as an issue which had made their lives difficult, it was a conversation the director chose not to share. In fact, considering the extent of the black presence in the film, and the subject being one of fitting back into society, it is striking that race prejudice – either socially or individually – would not be mentioned during any of the group therapy sessions which were filmed. During one of these sessions the same black soldier who was missing his partner reminisces about growing up and being discouraged from mixing with other children, if his mother thought that they were inferior. He declares that he had learned from mixing with colleagues in the army that he could get along with 'any Tom, Dick, or Harry', and that his mother had been wrong to display an attitude of superiority. The psychiatrist who is facilitating the discussion feels able to inform him that, in fact, his mother was really suffering from an inferiority complex.³⁸

We therefore see the same soldier – ironically enough named Griffith, as in D.W. of *The Birth of a Nation* – once beginning to relate some of the obstacles that he and his black partner had placed in front of them and being cut off before he was able to begin; we then have his story from childhood, which offers a challenge to the racial status quo, with a black mother discouraging a child from playing with others because they were not good enough, and he is immediately corrected so that it chimes with the more expected story of a black mother having an inferiority complex. In fact, much of the documentary is made up of the individual stories of men being interpreted or translated so that they fit into a wider narrative. We see a man who is unable to talk without stammering. An injection of sodium amytal frees his speech, and he is asked to remember when he was first afflicted. He recalls that it was on a boat from which he

³⁸ A similar correction takes place when a young white soldier makes the point that many family problems can be the result of economic factors. He recalls arguments occurring when there was no food on the table. The psychiatrist asks him if he can remember the arguments more than the food, and because he can, he concludes that the food was never really that important.

was watching flying fish and he remembers some of the men laughing at something he said. Walter Huston then takes over the story and connects problems with the 's' sound in 'flying fish' with the fear of a missile attack, the susurrations of the two forming a link in the unconscious. Defence mechanisms apparently kicked in to try to prevent the speech/missiles completing. This is a seductive explanation, but it is one offered by Huston whilst the actual patient is silenced. Huston occupies this privileged position throughout the film. The very first time we see the men, he is able to declare that every one of them carries in his heart 'a feeling of hopelessness and utter isolation.' In his role as narrator, Huston is also able to rove the wards at night and inform us of the patients' dreams and fears.

Let There Be Light is a film which can be criticised on the basis of its verisimilitude. It manipulates its material, and the viewer towards a desired effect. But that does not necessarily make the film dishonest if it was communicating a greater truth: one of broken soldiers receiving psychiatric care intended to repair their shattered nerves, and receiving treatment in a way that did not prioritise one race over another and treated all humanely. The War Department film that replaced it could make no such noble claims.

Shades of Gray

The film *Shades of Gray* uses material from other films in an unimaginative, misleading, and ultimately dishonest way and has little to recommend it as an interesting technical or aesthetic achievement. And yet it is an important film for a number of reasons. It was the film that was made to replace *Let There Be Light* and provides an interesting point of comparison for considering why the earlier film was prohibited from a public screening; it was made with the cooperation of leading psychiatrists, and therefore provides an insight into the priorities they were working on, and wished to propagate in the aftermath of war; and it is one of the more blatant examples of the desire of the psychiatric and psychoanalytic professions to use film as a powerful medium to influence viewers.

Although the film was made as a replacement for *Let There Be Light*, it borrows more material from the earlier *Psychiatric Procedures in the Combat Area*. There is no representation of racial minorities in the film, in sharp contrast to *Let There Be Light*, and there is an undercurrent of homophobia, with references to "sissiness" and a

valorisation of the strong, independent male child. In conversation with Charles Morgan, the film's producer, Frank Payne told of how:

it was sometimes necessary to overdub the soundtrack because an actor would sound too much like a fairy, or gay. We couldn't have that you know for an Army picture. One actor was really good, but I think that he picked up all that gay talk by hanging out with the nancy-boys.³⁹

During the film there is a noticeable shift away from scenes of combat and into the domestic. The cause of mental disturbance is placed quite clearly in the realm of childhood, and specifically focuses on the role of the mother. The implication is that problems later in life are invariably the result of being overindulged by a coddling mother.

No black soldiers were used in the main scenes; in fact, the whole film has one shot of a black person in action, lasting for just a few frames – ironically, this is probably stock army footage shot by John Huston. This lack of a black human presence is in contrast to the structure of the film, which relies on the desirability of whiteness and the pejorative associations of blackness. The whole narrative of the story is based on an equation between whiteness, health, and life, and of blackness as indicative of sickness and death. The 'shades of grey' of the title is the reality of what we all are, but the ideal that we should be aspiring to is pure whiteness; what we, with the help of psychiatrists, must absolutely avoid, is blackness. This is the first point which the film makes: 'even the healthiest people aren't pure-white healthy or the sickest people solid black sick – unless they're dead – instead people are somewhere in between, neither white nor black, but some shade of grey.' This is graphically illustrated below, with the top image showing mentally healthy soldiers and the bottom those with mental issues.

³⁹ Morgan III, 'From "Let There Be Light" to "Shades of Grey"', 149.



Figure 16: Soldiers symbolised as white when mentally healthy in *Shades of Gray* (1948).



Figure 17: Soldiers symbolised as black when mentally unwell in *Shades of Gray* (1948)

As a staged performance of at least two other War Department films, stock footage, and newly scripted scenes, the film does present a fascinating historical assemblage. The probing viewer can learn much by observing the differences that were made to the words spoken, the gestures of the participants, and the style of filming. We become aware of the message that the military and psychiatric personnel wanted to propagate about mental illness within and outside the armed services, and about how film can be manipulated to steer the viewer towards a desired belief. This is most obviously the case in the account *Shades of Gray* provides of a soldier who is finding it impossible to

think of killing anyone and is fearful of seeing dead bodies. This is the patient we met earlier in *Psychiatric Procedures in the Combat Area*.

In the original film, the soldier spends most of the interview looking either towards the interviewer or with his head down, but with his body in a position that suggests engagement with the psychiatrist. By contrast, the actor playing his role is seated away from the interviewer and refuses to make eye contact either with him or the camera (see below). His speech is also more muffled and hesitant than in the original.



Figure 18: Real patient in *Psychiatric Procedures in the Combat Area* (1944).



Figure 19: Actor recreating the scene in *Shades of Gray* (1948).

More startling than this, though, is the changes made to the story he tells. The reconstruction in *Shades of Gray* begins as a relatively faithful repeat of what took place in the earlier film. The patient is suffering because of a fear of seeing dead people. In the original film, the psychiatrist asks the patient if he was ever involved in a fight as a youngster. The patient replies that he never cared for fighting, and that when he was

about 16, he witnessed a street fight in which one of the fighters hit his head on a kerb and subsequently died. This would seem to have been his only exposure to violence before joining the army, and it left him with the conviction that fighting was not a wise way to resolve disputes. When asked how it made him feel, he replied: 'Made me feel like I shouldn't fight'. In *Shades of Gray*, the actor adds that he saw blood all over the place, and 'I was scared. I was scared to tell my parents. I had nightmares about it for years.' The reason he was afraid of telling his parents was because the story is related as happening when he was just 6 years old.

This fabrication is carried out to fit in with the overall message of the later film. *Shades of Gray* shows war is not what produces mental problems in the majority of cases. It is rather the inadequate preparation for producing fighting men by society generally, and over-protective mothers particularly. Earlier sequences compare and contrast the upbringing of Bill Brown and Joe Smith. Bill is shown responding to the threat of another boy taking his bicycle from him by fighting back and refusing to give up his possession. Joe, on the other hand, offers no resistance to a boy who steals his toy wagon, dealing with the situation by crying for his mother, who soon appears and comforts him. The film suggests that this pattern will be carried through to adulthood because such events are lodged deep in the unconscious. So, we see at the age of 16, Bill is confident, sporty, and sociable; Joe, we are shown, is wary of girls and spends most of his time with his parents. This is why the film chose to recreate rather than replicate the story of violence offered by the patient above. By the age of 16, according to the psychoanalytically inclined psychiatric outlook of *Shades of Gray*, most of a person's character formation is set. In this world view, if a boy of 6 witnesses a traumatic incident, how well he is able to speak about it to his parents, so that they can make sense of it for him, will dictate whether it leads to later nightmares and an eventual incapacity for fighting the nation's wars.

Charles Morgan concludes his study of the intrigues around the making of *Shades of Gray* with the claim that William Menninger played 'an executive role in ensuring this official interpretation of combat fatigue was presented to the American public ... that [it] was the official messenger of truth to the nation.'⁴⁰ This was certainly a time when Menninger would have been able to exert the most influence on such a project. William

⁴⁰ Morgan III, 142.

C. Menninger was the younger brother of Karl A. Menninger, and before the war he functioned very much in the shadow of his elder brother and fellow psychiatrist. The war went some way towards changing roles. While Karl stayed in Topeka, William served in the Surgeon General's office in charge of psychiatric services, and by the end of the war he had been made Brigadier General. When he returned home, he wrote *Psychiatry in a Troubled World* and also set up and led the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (GAP), a group of younger psychiatrists who wanted to ensure that the profession consolidated the advances it had made in the war. Will was a cover star of *Time* magazine, and had the ear of persons of influence in government and various agencies.⁴¹

Karl's influence did not wane, but was more theoretically inclined than his younger sibling. Where the two of them had a shared interest, without necessarily working together or with the same aims, was in the field of film. Each of them – despite having limited love for the medium as viewers – was convinced that film could have powerful effects on society, and that it was vital that the 'psy' professions were able to have a degree of control over how they were portrayed on screen. So, while William was busy ensuring that *Shades of Gray* would become the psychiatric film template for combat fatigue, Karl was involved in trying to manoeuvre the way the profession was to be portrayed in Alfred Hitchcock's thriller *Spellbound* (1945). Edith May Romm was acting as an uncredited psychiatric consultant on the film, and Menninger was in regular contact with her to make sure that the psychoanalysts in the film were shown in as positive a light as possible.⁴²

Interestingly, the idea of a breaking point during war, beyond which even the strongest man could not pass, was evoked memorably by Karl in a speech that he made after an official visit to Europe as war was drawing to a close. He said that 'it is not only flesh and blood that have their limits of tolerance. The human spirit can break also and does.'⁴³ He went on to describe the various shocks and strains that could lead to

⁴¹ See Friedman, *Menninger*. Winslow, *The Menninger Story*. William Claire Menninger, *Psychiatry in a Troubled World: Yesterday's War and Today's Challenge* (New York: Macmillan Co, 1948).

⁴² Menninger's interest was solely in the pragmatic portrayal of the analyst as a professional person. He displayed no curiosity regarding what has become the most well-known scene in the film, a dream sequence with a set design by Salvador Dali.

⁴³ Winslow, *The Menninger Story*, 282.

anyone feeling despair and concluded that in such a situation: ‘The mental faculties fail; fear and depression supplant courage, obsessions and delusions replace logical thinking.’⁴⁴ This was the very message which William sought to supplant, and the reason for the replacement of a powerful, distinctive and provocative film with one that was insipid, offensive, and dishonest.

Home of the Brave

Home of the Brave (1949) had a hurried and secretive production, the aim being to be the first mainstream Hollywood production dealing with racial issues as its principal subject to reach America’s cinema screens. Producer Stanley Kramer claims that the secrecy was to prevent the production of the film being stalled by racist protests, and for that reason the working title of the film was changed to *High Noon*. This seems an unlikely explanation given that the film was an adaptation of the stage play of the same name, which featured a Jewish character in the pivotal role. Two years earlier, Darryl Zanuck and Elia Kazan’s *Gentleman’s Agreement* was released without any notable protests, following on from *Crossfire* the year before – both films dealing with antisemitism – so there would have been little risk in making the film as if it were an adaptation of the play.⁴⁵ Indeed, one of the reasons for changing the main character from a Jew to black was because the social problem film regarding antisemitism had come to seem unexciting.⁴⁶ Kramer’s eagerness for secrecy and speed was more likely born out of a desire to exploit the commercial advantage of the publicity and the likely goodwill that would attach itself to the first film that could claim the mantle of “Negro tolerance picture”.⁴⁷ Carl Foreman, who had worked on one of the early scripts of *Know*

⁴⁴ Winslow, 282.

⁴⁵ The play, written by Arthur Laurents, also had a homoerotic subtext still discernible in the film. Laurents claims that when he asked why the Jewish lead was being changed to a black character, he was told that ‘Jews have been done.’ Laurents was also responsible for the screenplays for *The Snake Pit* (1948), set in a mental hospital, and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope* (1948), a tale of homosexual desire and murder that would have been unimaginable as a film project before the end of the war. Laurents escaped from America when the House Un-American Activities Committee began its pursuit of Hollywood liberals and he was blacklisted until the mid-1950s. Emma Brockes, ‘A Life in Musicals: Arthur Laurents’, *The Guardian*, 31 July 2009, sec. Stage, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/aug/01/arthur-laurents-musicals-interview>.

⁴⁶ When Darryl Zanuck completed *Gentleman’s Agreement*, he is said to have announced. ‘let’s do it again with a Negro’, which would eventually lead to the production of *Pinky*.

⁴⁷ Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 144.

Your Enemy: Japan, adapted the stage script into a screenplay in a matter of weeks, which Kramer claimed was easy as the only change required was the that of the Peter Coen of the play into Peter Moss of the film (Moss was chosen as a name to recognise the work of Carlton Moss on *The Negro Soldier*).⁴⁸

The publicity posters for the film are interesting in that they do little to show that the figure of Moss is the central character of the story and the pivotal role. Most of the posters have small equal pictures of the five main characters, with Moss separated from the others. This is understandable given that it is how each of them come to relate to him – and him to them – which forms the narrative arc of the film; more striking is the fact that James Edwards is not listed as playing a starring role in the film, listed below Frank Lovejoy, Lloyd Bridges, and Douglas Dick (see below).



Figure 20: Promotional posters for *Home of the Brave* (1949).

The decisive scenes in the film are those which take place between Moss and his psychiatrist. Importantly, in these scenes we see Moss as representing those who have returned from the war and who need to be assimilated back into American society; we also see the psychiatrist as the expert on the American mind who can act as the agent to best facilitate this. Moreover, he is clearly Jewish, thus indicating that the future of

⁴⁸ Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 223.

America is dependent on the full integration of those who have been previously ostracised. In the play, the doctor was not given a Jewish identity, and the political scientist Michael Rogin suggests that this relationship was meant to reflect Jewish–black alliances that were being fostered in places such as the journal *Commentary*.⁴⁹ This reorientation of postwar America is further symbolised through the task of mapping an island, and it is Moss who has the skills to lead the operation. Once the group are on the island, it is clear that they are operating in a jungle terrain. This symbolism is again important. Whereas the slave ships set off for the African jungles to capture bodies based on their usefulness for industry, the film will show the group of whites carry Moss back to their boat. He cannot walk and is undergoing a mental crisis. Whereas the slaves were taken to America to have their sense of identity destroyed, to be turned into a machine, Moss is returned to the country to be made whole again, so that he can return to society on the same basis as the rest of his group. And he does this, when he sets out at the end of the film, to establish a business with Mingo.

This conclusion has been criticised on the basis that it equates Moss with Mingo, who has lost an arm in the jungle. Rogin says that the impact of racial prejudice has been to turn Moss into ‘half a man’ or a castrated figure, and that this explains why he bonds with Mingo.⁵⁰ However, this assumes that the viewer sees Mingo as less than a man because of the loss of his arm, when from the start of the film his character is clearly shown as the one with a real moral core. His politics are unclear, but we see someone who treats everyone fairly and has the courage to face down prejudice. His – and Moss’s – nemesis is T.J., who, outside of the army, is the most successful person in the group. He is the one who will go back to a good job and exert the most influence in society. It is likely that he will find much more receptive ears for his racist views in the postwar environment than he has while working with the small group, and by extension the cinema audience. The audience is being asked to align themselves with

⁴⁹ For a recent account of black and Jewish relations and alliances in postwar America, see Marc Dollinger, *Black Power, Jewish Politics: Reinventing the Alliance in the 1960s*, Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2018).

⁵⁰ Michael Rogin, ‘Home of the Brave’, in *The War Film*, ed. Robert T. Eberwein (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 83. A similar point is made by Thomas Cripps, when he describes the ending as making an ‘uneasy equation’, but he does temper it with an acknowledgement of the shot also being ‘the first postwar instance of a visually argued assertion of a social need for “integration”’. Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 224.

Mingo and Mossy – two people who would normally be outcasts of society – against the likes of T.J., who, the film suggests, carry too much influence in moulding opinion.

Moss is receiving psychiatric help as a result of seeing his childhood friend Finch (Lloyd Bridges) killed by the Japanese on the island. He has been unable to walk since the event, despite no physical damage to his legs. The trauma of the death was made unbearable for Moss because he wished for Finch to be killed immediately prior to the shot, because Finch had called Moss a ‘yellow-bellied ni-’, hastily changing the intended epithet of “n-----” to ‘nitwit’. Interestingly, when Frantz Fanon describes a visit to the cinema in *Black Skin, White Masks*, and his sensation of waiting for the image on the screen to define what form he takes in the mind of the white audience, it is *Home of the Brave* that is being shown.⁵¹ And Moss experiences a similar abjection to Fanon, the ‘crushing objecthood’ on hearing the words ‘dirty n-----’.⁵²

The scholar and filmmaker Elizabeth Reich challenges the reading of the film which sees Moss as accepting the prognosis of the white psychiatrist, instead arguing that Moss continues to resist the doctor right up to the conclusion. Reich’s fascinating interpretation is that Moss and the analyst act out a lynching, with the body of Finch being the victim and Moss transferring the violence on to his own being. This represents the violent trauma which forms the primal scene of black consciousness.⁵³ Although the psychiatrist might have persuaded Moss of the events and feelings that have led to his illness, in order for him to be fully cured, Moss needs to be accepted by the everyman of America, who in this instance is represented by Mingo. She draws attention to the way in which the doctor finally forces Moss to walk, which is by addressing him as “n-----”, which at first provokes an attack by Moss, but which morphs into a hug in the psychiatrist’s arms. This manages to ratify the doctor’s claim that Moss has been affected on an individual level by such insults and can control his reaction to them; at the same time, it confirms Moss’s view that racism has been at the heart of his condition.⁵⁴ If a social solution is to be brought about, it is not enough for experts such as the psychiatrist to diagnose society’s ills; pragmatic people such as Mingo need to form alliances with the embattled and prejudiced in order to negate the

⁵¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 107.

⁵² Fanon, 82.

⁵³ Reich, *Militant Visions*, 148–49.

⁵⁴ Reich, 151.

effects of T.J. and those with similar views. However, by locating the problem with Moss and his reaction to perceived injustices, the film elides the fact that his best white friend resorts to racist insults as soon as he is put under any pressure. Rather than acting as proof of Moss's view of American society as endemically racist, the film insists that racial intolerance and abuse of Moss functions on the same level as dismissal of Mingo because he only has one arm.

Although the scenes between Moss and the doctor carry echoes of the scenes shot in Mason Hospital which went to make up *Let There Be Light*, the interpretation which is applied to them is much more in line with the developmental model that was propagated in the later military-sanctioned film *Shades of Gray*. Moss's problems are shown as stemming from his childhood, and are what led to him having a breakdown after witnessing Finch being tortured. Although the other men in the group are close to Finch, they do not succumb to the same psychological problems. The doctor goes to great pains to stress the similarity of men under stress. It is usual for a person to feel glad when a colleague is killed out of sheer relief that it was someone else who received a bullet. The reason that Moss cannot let such a feeling go is because he felt a momentary hatred towards Finch, which could have led to him wishing that he were dead. It is the mix of guilt and aggression which Moss experiences when he is confronted with racism that leads to him being unable to handle situations in the same way as others. The psychiatrist stresses that this is the result of being over-sensitive, and it is in Moss's own remit to be able to turn this around.

This rewriting of Moss's experience – the insistence that he accepts a story with his over-sensitivity as the key to his rehabilitation into society – bears comparison to the re-education of Chinese citizens who were seen as needing consciousness raising. We are presented with Moss as a psychologically sick individual who represents a threat to white society if he cannot be made to understand that his response to racism is irrational and is only acting as a barrier to integration. The film constitutes a battle between the doctor and Moss for a correct understanding of Moss's condition.⁵⁵ And in order to make this happen, all of the armoury of brainwashing is called on: drugs, hypnosis, abreaction, and autobiographical corrections. Ultimately, though, it is racial abuse which provokes the reaction which allows Moss to begin to walk again.

⁵⁵ Reich, 132–33.

Furthermore, it is the aggression and violence which Fanon sees as a necessary condition for breaking the cycle of colonial subjugation which sparks Moss into action.⁵⁶ In this case, though, the violence is not followed through and Moss allows himself to be integrated into the explanatory framing of the doctor and the compromised employment solution of Mingo.

A notable absence in *Home of the Brave* – less commented on than the presence of a black central character – is that of a female character. It is almost as if in addressing the issue of race in a progressive manner, the toxic presence of a female character would have been too much of a distraction. The story told so far of re-educated and brainwashed subjects has also been one of male endeavours. Black female sexuality featured in only one of the four ‘race films’ of 1949. The film was *Pinky*, and the eponymous heroine was played by the notably pale Jeanne Crain. Our final core chapter considers miscegenation, the spectre of passing, and how the discourses pertaining to them had an echo in fears attached to brainwashing.

⁵⁶ See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968), Chapter 2.

Chapter 8 – Pinky: Neither Black nor White

What can be seen, what qualifies as a visible marking, is a matter of being able to read a marked body in relation to unmarked bodies, where unmarked bodies constitute the currency of normative whiteness.
Judith Butler¹

The aim of this chapter is twofold: first, to illustrate how the various layers of the film industry directly collaborate – formally and informally – with agencies of social control, and thus produce movies which distil and distribute dominant discourses; second, to demonstrate how film has an uncanny ability to disturb this process, sometimes unintentionally offering alternative ways of taking in the same visual information, a viewing “against the grain” or with a kaleidoscopic twist. I offer this through an exploration of the now largely forgotten film *Pinky* (1949), a film which, upon its release, was something of a sensation. It attracted large crowds and generated much publicity. Its story of a woman undergoing an identity crisis, played out as a dilemma over the combination of light skin and a black heritage, chimed with national concerns about America’s racial future. It also allowed audiences to contemplate more personal and individual questions revolving around authenticity and performance. This chapter considers the political and ideological forces that went into the making and promotion of the film, and its intentions to help bring about a change in attitudes towards race. It offers a close reading of the film as an example of cinema’s strange capacity to speak to the unconscious and unsettle the certainty of the surface.

The previous chapter concluded with an analysis of Stanley Kramer’s *Home of the Brave* (1949), the first of a number of films made in and around that year with race as a central theme. As the film’s producer, Kramer was keen to ensure that his movie was first to reach the screens, and he managed to beat rival producers Darryl Zanuck and Louis De Rochemont in the pursuit. The five films which are generally included as a mini-genre in this short period – *Home of the Brave* (1949), *Lost Boundaries* (1949), *Pinky* (1949), *Intruder in the Dust* (1949) and *No Way Out* (1950) – attracted much publicity, generally positive receptions, and good box-office returns. At the end of 1949, *Variety* declared that ‘the film’s leading b.o. star for 1949 wasn’t a personality, but . . . a

¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 170.

subject—racial prejudice .’² The industry magazine referred to the new genre as ‘Negro-Tolerance Pix’. The films were generally grouped together in this way and lauded as demonstrating a new willingness on the part of Hollywood to take on difficult issues. This chapter shows that the films were a natural development from the direction the movie industry was taking. It made for good publicity to treat the films as a startling new genre, but the seeds for the films were planted years before, and were a natural development of industry trends. The previous chapter revealed the threads which ran from the army psychiatry films of World War II to *Home of the Brave*; a similar thread links the good black citizen of *Pinky*, *Lost Boundaries*, and *No Way Out* to the elaboration of the same narrative in *The Negro Soldier*. Their promotion and the discussions they generated were at least as important as the films themselves; such debates positioned race as an issue that America had to assess and to which it needed to adapt.

However, in this chapter, I also make the case that *Pinky* was different from the other films in the cycle. It privileged women to a degree not often seen in Hollywood at this point, and cleverly questioned the confidence that the film viewer places in the “visibility of race”. We are led to see the film’s heroine as neither black nor white. The film creates instability around the face and body of its star, with the result that the racial “common sense” which many viewers brought to the cinema could have been shattered when they left. I look at the role of the director, star actor, company president, screenwriter and film producer in bringing the film to the screen. I interrogate the motivating factors from outside of Hollywood, and the film techniques that were employed to deliver the message that the audience was intended to take away.

Paving the Way for the Race Cycle

When *Variety* announced that 1949 had been a year with racial prejudice as its leading player, there was something inevitable about the statement. The magazine had made regular predictions that it would be such a year and built up the ‘development of a race to be first on the screen with the subject.’³ And the magazine was clear that this was at least in part a politically motivated development, linking the election of President Truman in November 1948 with a determination on the part of the movie industry to

² ‘\$20,000,000 Box-Office Payoff for H’wood Negro-Tolerance Pix.’, *Variety*, 30 November 1949, 1.

³ ‘Truman “Rewrites” H’wood Scripting as Pix Lean to Social Significance’, *Variety*, 19 January 1949, 1.

deliver films ‘smacking of “social significance.”’⁴ These four or five films (*No Way Out* is sometimes not included, for no better reason than it was made in 1950) were often reviewed together; this has led to other films with a racial theme which came out before them sometimes being overlooked. But the more we look for films with a racial theme before the 1949 cycle, the more we see that it was really a natural development, rather than something which arrived *sui generis*.

In his meticulous study *Making Movies Black* (1993), Thomas Cripps did treat the films as a cycle, partly because they ‘carried the central metaphor of integrationism ...: the lone Negro, or small cell of them being introduced into a larger white group who would be told that they will be better for the experience.’⁵ He also argued that ‘they acted like a collective solution to an aesthetic, commercial, and political problem ... they half-formed the age they were half-formed by.’⁶ At the same time, Cripps goes to pains to place them in the context of a burgeoning social-problem genre which had grown out of the war (one which was running out of problems to screen), and an increasing presence of racial themes and roles. The two most significant social-problem films were both stories of antisemitism: Edward Dmytryk’s *Crossfire* (1946) and Elia Kazan’s *Gentleman’s Agreement* (1947). Cripps also spotlights several films released in 1947 which offered black roles or racial themes that would have been hard to imagine before the war, among them *The Foxes of Harrow* (1947), *The Boy with Green Hair* (1947), and *Body and Soul* (1947). Special mention is given to *The Quiet One* (1947), the story of a troubled black child growing up in Harlem who is taken to the reformatory Wiltwyck School. The staff in this liberal institution are shown trying to help the young boy adapt to society and improve his life chances. The film was well received by the majority of critics, with Bosley Crowther comparing it favourably to the recent Italian neo-realist films that had received great praise.⁷

The Film

As we have seen, during 1948 there were enough social and political indicators of the topical relevance and appeal of the racial theme to encourage a number of Hollywood

⁴ ‘Truman “Rewrites” H’wood Scripting as Pix Lean to Social Significance’, 1.

⁵ Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 220.

⁶ Cripps, 220.

⁷ Bosley Crowther, ‘“The Quiet One,” Documentary of a Rejected Boy, Arrives at the Little Carnegie’, *New York Times*, 14 February 1949, 15.

producers and directors to stake money and reputation on the favourable reception of films exploring the subject.⁸ This is confirmed in a letter sent by William Wyler to Henry Ginsberg, Paramount Pictures⁹ producer, at the end of 1948 in which he set out his wish to direct a film adaptation of *No Way Out*. He wrote:

I am sure you can visualise the kind of exploitation this kind of film would have. In all probability the President of the United States would urge people to see it ~ certainly all church groups of every denomination would urge people to get behind such a film ... and it would be the most talked of film of the year.¹⁰

He goes on to say that opposition to the film will only add to the general interest it can provoke: 'I feel whatever revenue is lost in the South will be compensated for (BY FAR) by increased grosses in the other forty states and in the rest of the world.'¹¹ Film historian Thomas Cripps regards *Pinky* as significant partly because it represents the first time a major studio would fully get behind a picture in the newly fledged genre. Fox boss, Spyros Skouras told the film's producer Darryl Zanuck that they should 'give 'em controversy with class'.¹²

The predictions of Wyler proved well-founded. *Pinky* took in \$3.8 million at the box office, making it seventh in the list of top-grossing films that year, and the most successful for Twentieth Century-Fox.¹³ The trade magazine, *Variety*, had anticipated that it would be the second highest grossing film of the year (before official figures

⁸ For a contemporary account of the practices leading to the making of a film, see Leo C. Rosten, *Hollywood: The Movie Colony, the Movie Makers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1941). For good background on Rosten and his study, see John L. Sullivan, 'Leo C. Rosten's Hollywood: Power, Status, and the Economic and Social Networks in Cultural Production', in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (New York: Routledge, 2009). For a masterful overview of Hollywood as a business during this period, see Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*.

⁹ Paramount Pictures was one of the "Big Five" movie studios, alongside MGM, Warner Bros., Twentieth Century-Fox, and RKO Pictures. It was under particular pressure at this time as the defendant in a Supreme Court case holding that the studio's distribution scheme contravened antitrust laws.

¹⁰ William Wyler, 'Paramount Pictures', 31 December 1948, William Wyler Papers Folder 687, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

¹¹ Wyler.

¹² Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 232.

¹³ Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*, 6:6.

were returned) behind *Jolson Sings Again*.¹⁴ *Motion Picture Daily* provided a sense of the anticipation around the film. Its reviewer described how the stormy weather on its opening day (29 September 1949 at New York's Rivoli Theatre) failed to prevent large audiences turning out, making it the venue's biggest matinee in ten years.¹⁵ The promoters had seen the rewards of a publicity campaign which focused on the crowds who were lining up to see the film, with daily updates on the queues and the numbers.



Figure 21: Promotions showing queues for *Pinky* (1949).

Based on the novel *Quality*¹⁶ by Cid Ricketts Sumner, published in 1946 (after being serialised in *Ladies' Home Journal*), the story concerned a white-skinned, dual-heritage woman, Pinky (Jeanne Crain), who trained as a nurse in the north (or 'up yonder' as it is always referred to in the film). While there, she has been in a relationship with a white doctor, Tom (William Lundigan) who is unaware of her "true nature" and this has brought to a head her dilemma over identity. Pinky returns to the home of her grandmother, Aunt Dicey (Ethel Waters) to try to work out her best course of action.

¹⁴ Herb Golden, 'Players, Prods., Meggers Rated', *Variety*, 4 January 1950, 1. The paper also listed the 17 films that had been shortlisted for best film, and all four of the 'race films' made the list.

¹⁵ Motion Picture Daily, 'Storms Fail to Prevent Crowds', *Motion Picture Daily*, 30 September 1949.

¹⁶ Sumner, *Quality*.

The film is set in an undefined, but clearly Southern town. Appalled by the racism she witnesses, and feeling that she does not fit in, she decides to leave. However, her plans are derailed by the illness of her grandmother's white matriarchal employer, Miss Em (Ethel Barrymore). Pinky is pressured into caring for Miss Em by Aunt Dicey and after a hostile introduction, the patient and her nurse come to respect one another. So much so, that when Miss Em dies, Pinky is the chief beneficiary of the will. This is contested by Miss Em's relatives on grounds of blood and race, and Pinky is forced to go to court to fight her case. She wins, but this presents her with a dilemma of either staying on to run a segregated clinic as Pinky Johnson (it was Miss Em's wish that Pinky would turn the house into a clinic) or starting a new life with her lover, as Mrs Thomas Adams in Denver: a new life that will erase her previous history. She chooses to stay and run the clinic.

The novel's author was born in Mississippi in 1890, but by 1910 she was living in the North. Sumner approved of segregation and was dismissive of any move towards civil rights. In the novel, Pinkey's¹⁷ lawyer takes on her case purely to stir up racial tension, and Sumner equates the country's emerging welfare state facilities with slavery, with the state taking the place of the slaveowner. One difference from the film is that in the novel the clinic is burned down by racists, but it is a serious misreading to interpret this as an injection of reality missing from the film. There is relief throughout the town that Pinkey will be unable to live in Miss Em's home. At the same time, there is a sense of assuaged guilt and an appropriate ending – that she will still be able to build a clinic from the undamaged slave quarters.

When filming began, Zanuck was concerned by stories of John Ford's behaviour on the set, and despaired of the footage the director was shooting. According to him, 'Ford's Negroes were like Aunt Jemima.'¹⁸ Ford only lasted a couple of days on the project. The official reason given was a bout of shingles, but most people involved in the film went on to acknowledge that Ford and leading black actress Ethel Waters found it difficult to work together, and it was this that led to a change of director.¹⁹

¹⁷ Is there an echo here of the change of Darryl Zanuck's name from Darrell? One of the most glaring changes from novel to screenplay is the change in the name from Pinkey to Pinky—a removal of the letter 'e' to emphasise a 'y'.

¹⁸ Joseph McBride, *Searching for John Ford: A Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), 489.

¹⁹ McBride, 489.

Waters told Zanuck that she hated Ford and he hated her, and they had heated arguments about how her character should be represented.²⁰

Darryl Zanuck

To a large extent, it is the involvement of Darryl Zanuck that makes this film of particular interest to the thesis. Elia Kazan credited him with the ability to respond to social changes that was akin to a “Geiger counter”. He could, said Kazan, ‘lay over society and when things began to move, he noticed them.’²¹ *Pinky* was a film he felt personally involved in, and committed to, around a subject that involved a degree of risk. It was also the most lavish and star-driven production of the cycle of films focused on race. It was therefore a film made by a producer and director team finely tuned to the concerns and fantasies of a postwar American cinema audience; a producer eager to cement his position as someone who had the ears of government officials, and therefore keen to make a film that would spread a positive social message, thereby discouraging the government from breaking up the industry’s monopoly position even further than they already had.

Acting a part, playing a role, allowing the other person to see what they wanted to see: this was at the core of what Zanuck did. It is difficult to believe that he was not performing in this way when he met Walter White in February 1942. White had travelled to Hollywood in his capacity as secretary of the NAACP. His mission was to persuade the moviemakers that they had a duty to ‘present the Negro as a normal human being and an integral part of human life and activity’. When he informed Zanuck of this, the producer remarked, ‘I make one-sixth of the pictures in Hollywood and I never thought of this until you presented the facts’.²² Acting as White’s guide during his trip was leading Republican Wendell Willkie. As chairman of the board of

²⁰ Space does not permit a proper investigation of Ford’s evasive views on race. He gave plenty of opportunities to black actors but often in roles such as Stepin Fetchit, which are now seen as particularly demeaning. His Westerns involved a lot of white audience delight in the killing of native Indians, but he could be seen as attempting recompense for this in his later films. He also had an abrasive attitude towards his cast, resenting anyone who thought they could improve the way a film was being shot and thought that by provoking them he could get a better performance. Kazan got on better with Waters, but she is said to have told him at a party that ‘I don’t like any fucking white man. I don’t trust any of you.’ McBride, 491.

²¹ Elia Kazan and Michel Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, Cinema One, 26 (London: Secker and Warburg [for] the British Film Institute, 1973), 62.

²² Janken and White, *Walter White*, 267.

Twentieth Century-Fox, and a vocal proponent of civil rights, he was the perfect go-between. Willkie was close friends with Zanuck, and following Willkie's death in 1944, the NAACP named its headquarters in his honour.

Willkie had stood as the Republican candidate in the 1940 presidential election. As Willkie fought his campaign on an interventionist platform, Zanuck too was active in preparing his industry for war. He was the chairman of the Motion Picture Academy Research Council, a body set up to coordinate industry support for the production efforts of the Army Signal Corps. This special reserve unit of 24 officers and over three hundred soldiers trained in film production was already making military training and information films. Zanuck was adamant that the industry should be clear in its rejection of isolationism and support of the military.²³ This support was backed up with financial contributions and, here, Zanuck was not alone among the major producers. Harry and Jack Warner (Warner Bros.) and Samuel Goldwyn (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) were major contributors to the Fight for Freedom Committee, the most prominent of the interventionist organisations formed before Pearl Harbor. The committee was represented in speaking engagements by Wendell Willkie, the author Dorothy Parker, actor Burgess Meredith, and Office of Strategic Services (OSS) founder William Donovan.²⁴

It was important to Zanuck to win the favour of government bodies.²⁵ He had enjoyed a close relationship with Franklin D. Roosevelt and felt comfortable as a regular visitor to Washington. But he had work to do if he wanted to win the favour of the current president. His earlier encounters with Truman had been negative. Zanuck had been called before the Truman Committee in 1943 to answer charges of taking a salary as a film producer whilst on active duty in the army.²⁶ On 31 May 1943, Zanuck

²³ Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*, 6:122.

²⁴ Nancy Snow, 'Confessions of a Hollywood Propagandist: Harry Warner, FDR and Celluloid Persuasion', in *Warner's War: Politics, Pop Culture & Propaganda in Wartime Hollywood*. Ed. Martin Kaplan and Johanna Blakley. (Los Angeles, CA: The Norman Lear Center, 2004), 68.

²⁵ See specifically Michael Ray FitzGerald, "'Adjuncts of Government": Darryl F. Zanuck and 20th Century-Fox in Service to the Executive Branch, 1935–1971', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 36, no. 3 (2 July 2016), 373–91. For more general examples, see Leonard Mosley, *Zanuck* (London: Granada, 1984).

²⁶ The Truman Committee was formed to address inefficiencies in US war production, and ran for seven years from 1941 to 1948, hearing from 1,798 witnesses during 432 public hearings. See James A. Thurber, ed., *Rivals for Power: Presidential-Congressional Relations*, 4th ed (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 301.

went on inactive duty, which meant that he did not have to answer the charges. The reason Zanuck's biographer Leonard Mosley gives for this decision is that Zanuck knew too much about future war plans and military developments because of his acquaintances; he was thus best kept out of the spotlight. He tells a story of Zanuck being summoned to an interview with General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the US Army. Marshall was concerned that Hollywood was abuzz with talk of a 'momentous new bomb' and Zanuck – having been made aware of atomic bomb developments by his Washington contacts – was regarded as the most likely source of the story. The decision to withdraw from duty is said to have emerged from this meeting.²⁷ In 1950, Zanuck was summoned back to active duty by Secretary of Defence, Louis Johnson, and received instructions to make a film about the Korean conflict.²⁸ The resulting film, *Why Korea?* (1950), offered unambiguous support for the war objectives of the Truman administration.²⁹

This is important because it shows that Zanuck was not in the business purely to make money or to entertain, that to influence people in power was a motivating factor for him. Of course, having the ears of the powerful may have been a vital part of maximising the profitability of the business and its moguls. The origins of the motivation are not crucial. What matters is that the movie industry and various branches of government and military and civil authorities had shared vested interests in using postwar cinema to spread targeted messages to a large and captive cinema audience.

Getting the timing of a film right was crucial to Zanuck, and he had been correct when making *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) with Kazan directing the story of a gentile passing as a Jew. This is regarded as one of the most important examples of the social-problem genre, and along with *Crossfire*, released the year before, one of the first to tackle the issue of antisemitism.³⁰ Upon completion, he sensed that there might be

²⁷ Mosley, *Zanuck*, 284–86.

²⁸ FitzGerald, "'Adjuncts of Government': Darryl F. Zanuck and 20th Century-Fox in Service to the Executive Branch, 1935–1971', 382.

²⁹ FitzGerald, 377.

³⁰ The war against Hitler and the growing awareness of the scale of Jewish deaths did not lead to a lessening of antisemitism in America. The American Jewish Committee had been conducting polls since 1938, asking whether people believed that Jews held too much power. The number who answered affirmatively peaked in July 1945, at 67 per cent (Carr 2001, 238).

limited appetite for more anti-antisemitic films, but that the model could easily be applied to other areas. He suggested to Kazan that they exploit the format to show the reality of racism in America.³¹

Provisional scripts of *Pinky* were sent to key members of the NAACP, including Walter White and Roy Wilkins, with the hope, according to Zanuck, that their feedback would mean the film would ‘prove beneficial to the cause of the American Negro’. At the same time, he was clear that whites were the target audience for the film, and that it was their views that must be changed. The production would have been a success if ‘the white majority of the United States experience emotionally the humiliation and hurt and evil of segregation and discrimination ... [and] carry away a sense of shame [so] ... their feeling and thinking will be changed.’³²

Clearly, Zanuck courted relationships with powerful individuals within government. He was most active as a producer when there was a growing belief that cinema was one of the most powerful tools available for influencing, and maybe controlling, the opinions and attitudes of people. A producer as canny as Zanuck did not need to be told by government that a story promoting racial tolerance would be appreciated and supported. The resulting film, then, should be viewed not just as a reflection of a changing attitude to race but as a tool used to help achieve it. As important as Zanuck was, he answered ultimately to a company president; he was reliant on a technically gifted screenwriter and director to bring his ideas to life on the screen; and he hoped for the charisma of actors to convince audiences of the “truth” of his vision. The thesis now looks at these figures in turn.

Spyros P. Skouras

The president of Twentieth Century-Fox for most of the time that Zanuck was producing was Spyros P. Skouras. A measure of how close Skouras was to the government can be seen in a letter he sent to President Dwight D. Eisenhower in January 1953. This followed a meeting with the President after Skouras took a 69-day trip, encompassing 72,000 miles, through a host of countries, including Japan, Korea, Indonesia, and Greece. The letter ran to 13 pages and was copied to Secretary of State, Alan Dulles. It provides a mixture of observations on the political climate and

³¹ Kazan and Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, 58.

³² Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 234.

propaganda efforts in the regions he visited, and he is bold enough to feel it appropriate to offer advice on future policy. He believes that most people desire leadership from America, seeing the country as ‘a Moses to lead them out of the wilderness and to a brighter day.’ But he highlights race as the Achilles heel of American propaganda efforts, and one that is delighted in by Red propagandists. He recommends that representatives of the country need to be fully briefed on the importance of how they interact with people of different races. It needs to be done in ‘a manner above reproach’. He goes on: ‘We can win their respect when we behave so that the people we are dealing with see that we regard them as equals’. He suggests that it might be worthwhile to set up a small unit in the State Department to manage a programme of indoctrination for anyone visiting countries abroad.³³

Unsurprisingly, Skouras sees film as a vital tool in the effort to win the hearts and minds of other nations, and not just domestic opinion: ‘The American motion picture cannot be overestimated as a weapon in an effort to win the allegiance of the people of the Far East.’ Indicating that he has had previous discussions with the President on the subject, he then says that, ‘The influence upon the masses of the motion picture, as you know, is incalculable’. Putting forward his own opinion, he states that ‘no other media of communication had more effect in acquainting the peoples of foreign countries with American freedom, American products and the American way of life in general than our motion pictures’. Among the films that he says were received positively and regarded as courageous statements was *Pinky*.³⁴

Elia Kazan

Elia Kazan’s view of his contribution and application to the film appeared to change according to the enthusiasm of the person to whom he was speaking. Nonetheless, he never classed it as one of his greatest works. Most of his ire was projected towards Jeanne Crain and her whiteness. He was most dismissive when interviewed by film critic Michel Ciment, beginning by protesting: ‘Don’t blame this one on me. I don’t. I didn’t help prepare the script. I didn’t have the idea of casting a most genteel, middle

³³ Spyros P. Skouras, ‘Spyros P. Skouras to Franklin D. Roosevelt’, 16 January 1953, 4. Full transcript available here as approved for release by the CIA 30 January 2003: <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80R01731R000900100014-1.pdf>

³⁴ Skouras, ‘Spyros P. Skouras to Franklin D. Roosevelt’, 16 January 1953.

class white girl as a light-skin black.³⁵ On another occasion he would say: ‘it is a total dodge. It is not about a black girl but about a charming little white girl.’³⁶ Kazan was withering in his account of Jeanne Crain’s role in the film. In a belittling, and strikingly nasty comment, Kazan described her as ‘white in her heart ... the blandest person I ever worked with.’³⁷ He remembered his psychological approach to working with his leading actress as one where: ‘The first thing I did was relax her, made her feel, put my hand on her body a little bit. I don’t mean sexually but like you do with a horse, you know, “Just take it easy, calm down. I’m here and you’re gonna be all right.”’³⁸ Kazan’s approach towards working with James Dean in a later film, *East of Eden* (1955), is similar, indeed even more Pavlovian:

His imagination was limited; it was like a child’s. To direct him was somewhat like directing Lassie the dog; the director dealt in a series of rewards and threats and played a psychological game with him. He had to be coddled and hugged or threatened with abandonment.³⁹

Given that Kazan seems to have had much less personal investment in the work than Zanuck did, it is nevertheless interesting to see the technical contribution he made to the production. By proceeding in a more mechanical way than if he had developed the project himself, we can see more clearly the practical effects he employed to manipulate the audience. Notably, Kazan makes good use of light and shade to complicate the way we see faces in the film. He also makes interesting choices when it comes to the employment of fades and transitions.⁴⁰

Jeanne Crain

The casting of Pinky herself was one of the more controversial aspects of the film, although it did not provoke quite as much contemporary comment as we might imagine. The decision to cast the remarkably light-skinned actress Jeanne Crain in the role was the result of a number of factors around personal image, studio contracts and

³⁵ Kazan and Ciment, *An American Odyssey*, 70.

³⁶ Kazan and Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, 59.

³⁷ Kazan and Ciment, 60.

³⁸ Elia Kazan and Jeff Young, *Kazan on Kazan* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 58.

³⁹ Kazan and Ciment, *An American Odyssey*, 217.

⁴⁰ These will be explored in more detail later in the chapter. Kazan became embroiled in controversy when giving evidence before HUAC in 1952: he named eight actors who he said had been members of the Communist Party. Because of the enormity of this act and its later date, these events must be passed over here.

availability. If the part had been played by a recognisably black actress, there would have been more controversy because of the romantic scenes in the film. Such scenes would have meant white audiences witnessing an actual inter-racial kiss. Given the prejudices of censors and viewers, particularly in the South, this was unlikely to happen, necessitating either a different narrative, or a compromise in the casting. It is one of the arguments of this thesis that a moving picture is the constellation of numerous decisions and compromises of both a creative and commercial nature. The result can be an object that captures and condenses social discourses that go beyond the input or intention of any individual. The casting of Jeanne Crain produces one of these strange effects, for which cinema is finely tuned. I contend that this ostensibly safe and closed casting choice served to reveal many of the issues around miscegenation which the film's narrative was careful to keep unspoken and hidden. It is summed up well by the film theorist Christopher John Jones who wrote: 'Film is like that. It is especially potent in its subconscious control of audiences, often to the point of overwhelming its own verbal content. It bears watching.'⁴¹

Fredi Washington was often mentioned as an actress who might have made a more convincing Pinky. Washington is most famous for playing the role of Peola, another black character passing as white, in the original 1934 version of *Imitation of Life*. She was so memorable in the role that it led, ironically, to her being typecast in the part of the mulatto. Indeed, some black Americans rejected her as someone who wanted to be white.⁴² Washington was seen as too dark to procure romantic leading roles and too light to play maids. In a move that prefigured some of the issues permeating *Pinky*, when she played opposite black star Paul Robeson in *The Emperor Jones* (1933), her skin was darkened so that there was no intimation of miscegenation between the two characters.⁴³

⁴¹ Christopher John Jones, 'Image and Ideology in Kazan's "Pinky"', *Literature Film Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (June 1981), 119.

⁴² Elvera L. Vilson, 'The Odyssey of African American Women in Films: From the Silent Era to the Post-War Years to the 1950s' (M.A., New York, CUNY Academic Works, 2017), 25.

⁴³ There was a clear prohibition of the portrayal of any contact on screen that might be construed as miscegenation. In 1930, the Motion Picture Production Code (more widely known as the Hays Code) came into operation. This was a series of principles established with the stated aim of encouraging 'correct thinking'. There were nine sections under the heading of Sex, and the sixth of them stated 'Miscegenation (sex relationships between the white and black races) is forbidden.'

Other light-skinned black actresses who were reported to have been considered for the role include Dorothy Dandridge and Lena Horne. The perceived necessity for a white actress in the role made their choice always unlikely. One white actress who was considered was Linda Darnell, and the reason for her rejection is more intriguing. Darnell was fresh from a successful role in Joseph Mankiewicz's *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949), also starring Jeanne Crain. Darnell was keen to play the role of Pinky, but screenwriter Philip Dunne thought she was wrong for the part: 'Pinky could not be an adventuress. She had to be whiter than white.'⁴⁴ Darnell had been cast in non-white parts, recently playing a Latina prostitute in John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946). Expanding on this theme, Dunne said that none of the people who criticise the performance of Crain really understand what is going on in the film. Regarding her alleged blandness, he became exasperated when telling John Ford's biographer Joseph McBride:

That's exactly why she was cast ... none of these people who criticize this can understand that she had to be cast that way. The whole point was that she had to look absolutely white. All they did was give her brown contact lenses. The message of the picture was very simple. ... People were wonderfully deferential to her until they found out and they turned completely, 180 degrees. I thought she did a beautiful job and I thought Kazan did a good job directing.⁴⁵

Kazan himself pointed out – perhaps unwittingly revealing why Crain is actually rather effective in the role – 'her face ... went so far in the direction of no temperament that you felt Pinky was floating through her experiences without reacting to them, which is what "passing" is'.⁴⁶

Philip Dunne

Dunne was given space in *The New York Times* on 1 May 1949 to outline what the makers of the film were looking to achieve through its release.⁴⁷ Dunne sees the production as a commercial vehicle, but clearly reveals the political motivations that led to the film being made, and the message it attempts to convey. He acknowledges

⁴⁴ Ronald L. Davis, *Hollywood Beauty: Linda Darnell and the American Dream*, 1st ed (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1991), 114.

⁴⁵ McBride, *Searching for John Ford*, 490.

⁴⁶ Kazan and Young, *Kazan on Kazan*, 54.

⁴⁷ Philip Dunne, 'Approach to Racism: Scenarist of "Pinky" Explains How Film Will Treat Subject of Negro Prejudice', *The New York Times*, 1 May 1949, 265.

that there has been a ‘long-standing taboo’ against the making of films touching on the subject of racial prejudice, and that the subject has been regarded as ‘inflammable’ by the motion-picture industry. He demonstrates that the threat of boycotts by groups opposed to such films is a factor that weighs into whether they can be made; the danger of a loss-making venture too much of a risk for the industry to take. Dunne sees the issue of race as one that is toxic for virtually every American; he exempts only the “foreigner” Gunnar Myrdal, author of *An American Dilemma*, from being passionate and prejudiced.

Dunne clearly positions the work as a piece of propaganda that has its roots in the filmmaking of World War II:

We have throughout remained conscious of our obligation to society in projecting such a film. The experience of the war has taught us that the motion picture is a powerful and persuasive vehicle of propaganda. What we say and do on the screen in productions of this sort can affect the happiness, the living conditions, even the physical safety of millions of our fellow citizens.⁴⁸

This is a powerful claim, contending that the cinema is capable of much greater impact than providing people with visual thrills and laughter. Talk of affecting the safety of millions of people may sound a little overblown to us now, but if the cycle of films gave people pause to think about their own part in everyday micro-aggressions, then it was only stating what might have been the case; certainly, at the very least it was part of what the filmmakers were hoping to achieve.

Dunne had replaced Dudley Nichols as scriptwriter on the film, and it was Dunne’s decision to bring in Jane White – daughter of Walter White – to act as a consultant. It was hoped that White’s black heritage and political background could bring some racial nuance to the production. Nichols had struggled with the scripting of the film, in part because he could not believe that a white man would willingly choose ‘to marry a girl with even a drop of African blood in her veins.’⁴⁹ Dunne described the assistance of White as invaluable. She allowed him to ‘avoid the pitfalls inherent in such a project.’⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Dunne, 265.

⁴⁹ Philip Dunne, *Take Two: A Life in Movies and Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, published in association with San Francisco Book Co, 1980), 62.

⁵⁰ Dunne, 62.

Writing for a more specialised audience in *Hollywood Quarterly* in 1945, Dunne had pondered how the documentary film would be used in postwar America. Dunne had directed the production activities of the Office of War Information (OWI) Overseas Motion Picture Bureau. He regarded the documentary as the most potent weapon in propagating ideas in such an environment. He contended that the documentary film's 'influence on the entertainment film may well become profound'.⁵¹ Dunne thought that the work of the film industry in supporting Americanism and democracy had only just begun, and whilst accepting that movies must be both entertaining and profitable it 'should also give expression to the American and democratic ideals'. With a confident flourish, he concluded that 'the industry is preparing to do its part in the fight for human freedom, tolerance, and dignity'.⁵²

Critical Reception

Critically, *Pinky* was generally well received, and there were few reviews that failed to mention the great acting skills on show from Ethel Barrymore and Ethel Waters, with *Variety* calling it 'some of the most subtle thesping ever caught by the camera'. There was more ambivalence regarding the film's star, Jeanne Crain, but all three main actors, including Crain, were rewarded with nominations for Academy Awards. There was little mention in the trade reviews regarding a white actress being cast in the role of the black lead, although Bosley Crowther, referred to the character as 'a girl with white skin but Negro blood'. If the failure to mention Jeanne Crain's whiteness is surprising, some of the film's features that were highlighted are shocking to the modern reader. *Variety* referred to 'an exciting sequence of attempted rape', and described Ethel Water's character as 'black-as-the-ace-of-spades'.⁵³

Newspapers which had a black readership were generally less ebullient in their response. In the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Marjorie McKenzie regretted that the film had become the second of the three race movies to have focused on the issue of passing.

⁵¹ Philip Dunne, 'The Documentary and Hollywood', *Hollywood Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1946), 168.

⁵² Dunne, 171.

⁵³ Trade reviews contained in "'Pinky" Clippings', n.d., Production Code Administration, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. A reproduction of Bosley Crowther's review is available here: 'Movie Review - - "Pinky," Zanuck's Film Study of Anti-Negro Bias in Deep South, Shown at Rivoli "Strange Bargain" and "Peddler and the Lady" Other Movies Having Local Premieres - NYTimes.Com', accessed 30 April 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9B00E3D9133FE33BBC4850DFBF668382659EDE>.

She argued that this was only a minor issue for people at the forefront of racial discrimination and abuse.⁵⁴ Robert Ellis wrote in the progressive Negro weekly, the *California Eagle* that the creative talents of Twentieth Century-Fox, despite good intentions, 'had approached this picture with too much money in their pockets and too much condescension, patronization, paternalism, in their hearts and minds.' Ellis said that the casting was a compromised, exploitative tactic to hint at cross-racial romance in a way that would still secure a comprehensive nationwide release. It was done so as not to offend 'reactionaries who would balk at the idea of Negro and white in love. And so Jeanne Crain is "Pinky" – but a white "Pinky" and the audience is subtly aware during the love scenes, that after all, this is only a movie.'⁵⁵ The miscegenationist compromise was also commented on in Virginia.⁵⁶ Ralph Dighton asked:

There are love scenes between Jeanne and the white doctor who loves her enough to overlook her Negro blood. If "Pinky" were portrayed by a Negro, how would audiences react to her being kissed by white Bill Lundigan?

Sometimes people will tolerate an idea where they wouldn't accept an actual fact.⁵⁷

The author V.J. Jerome gave a lecture in New York in February 1950, under the auspices of the Marxist cultural magazine, *Masses and Mainstream*. Under the title 'The Negro in Hollywood Films', Jerome was generally critical of the most recent batch of films. Regarding *Pinky*, he was impressed by the scene of police brutality, describing it as 'a great overpowering moment of film realism'. And he described the portrayal of overcharging Pinky for goods when her colour is revealed as 'a piercing comment on the "American way of life"'.⁵⁸ Jerome did criticise the film's portrayal of the white Southern working class as shown in the court scene. He summarised this as 'the poor whites are against her; the well-to-do whites are for her'.⁵⁹ This ignores the fact that the "well-to-do's" actually only pretend to help her and are as much against her winning

⁵⁴ Marjorie Mckenzie, 'Pursuit of Democracy', *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 October 1949, 15.

⁵⁵ Robert Ellis, 'Hollywood at Dawn', *The California Eagle*, 20 October 1949, 15.

⁵⁶ Hardly surprising given that the state was one of the more obsessive about correct enforcement of anti-miscegenation laws.

⁵⁷ Ralph Dighton, 'Controversial "Pinky" Holds Star's Career in Box Office Balance', *Daily Press (Newport News)*, 13 November 1949, 13.

⁵⁸ Jerome, *The Negro in Hollywood Films*, 23.

⁵⁹ Jerome, 24.

the case as anyone. Interestingly, though, the displacement of distasteful racism to the working classes is very much the tack of the upcoming film *No Way Out* (1950).⁶⁰

Jerome claimed that the film portrays Pinky as obviously superior to the other black characters in the film, and he argued that the whiteness of the casting was done to underscore this superiority. He suggested that it would have been going too far to have shown an actual Negro woman triumphing in a white man's court. He quoted the *New York Times* in its evocation of the relationship between Pinky and Miss Em as presenting 'a tender aspect of the mutual loyalties between Negro servants and white masters that still exist in the South'.⁶¹ He regarded Pinky's decision to stay and run the clinic, because it is segregated and paternalistic, as creating a 'New Stereotype': "liberal," "benevolent", Social-Democratic Jim Crow'. And he suggested that the film abounds in 'hideous stereotypes of the past', comparing the scene where Roxy (Nina Mae McKinney) is made to raise her skirt for the policeman with the 'shameful vilifying tradition of *The Birth of a Nation* and *Gone With the Wind*'.⁶² It might be suggested that the film evokes sympathy for the molested woman rather than a vicarious thrill at her expense, but, at the same time, the film does show Roxy with a razor in her stocking.

Jerome also addressed the film as a product of Hollywood, arguing that any output of such an institution should be met with a degree of scepticism. Even if what we see on the screen appears to be delivering a positive message, it is always worth asking what are the motivations behind making it? Who was it made by, who is its intended audience, and what do any of them really understand about what it means to be black in America? Jerome asks of the makers:

Have you ever stepped down from a railroad car and hunted for the colored toilet –gone hungry because there was no colored seat at the counter –walked along the street and felt the hatred and coldness in most people's eyes merely because of color? ... How can a studio, how can an industry that doesn't employ Negroes as writers, producers, technical directors, cameramen: —how can they

⁶⁰ In this 1950 film, also produced by Zanuck, the white middle class is shown as being progressive and supportive of racial equality. The poor white inhabitants of Beaver Canal are shown as possessing the animalistic, violent characteristics that would have previously been associated with black characters.

⁶¹ Jerome, *The Negro in Hollywood Films*, 27.

⁶² Jerome, 27.

write, direct, produce, or film a picture which has sincere and real sensitivity (shall we say artistry) about Negro people?⁶³

Walter White reviewed the film for the *Detroit Free Press*. Aside from saying that ‘the film is infinitely better than the novel from which it is adapted or the original script for the picture’, he could not be accused of favouring the film due to family associations. He credited it with ‘some excellent and courageous spots’ but bemoaned their presence as ‘infrequent as raisins in a 25-cent fruit cake’.⁶⁴ Indeed, he classed it as less honest and effective than *Home of the Brave* and *Lost Boundaries*, and even rated it behind *Intruder in the Dust*, which had not yet been released. Interestingly, he criticised the stereotypes embodied in the roles of Aunt Dicey and Jake but made no mention of the casting or performance of Jeanne Crain in the title role. He also berated the film for failing to show what progress was being made towards the abolition of segregation in the South and ‘the considerable growth of decent white opinion.’⁶⁵ This seems odd because the film shows a legalistic approach to justice, which is what the NAACP was itself pursuing. The pivotal scene in the film is the court scene in which Pinky is granted Miss Em’s bequest. What is crucial here is that the judge rules that he must honour the written will of the town’s white matriarch. This is despite the fact that he is not personally inclined to do so, and nor does Pinky’s legal representative really want to win the case. This indicates that the Constitution of the USA should be regarded as the best recourse for black Americans to achieve civil rights – a belief absolutely in line with the legal strategy of the NAACP.

⁶³ Jerome, 29.

⁶⁴ Walter White, ‘White Sees Flaws in Film “Pinky”’, *Detroit Free Press*, 16 October 1949, 17.

⁶⁵ White, ‘White Sees Flaws in Film “Pinky”’.

Light and Shade



Figure 22: Illustrations from *Look* magazine showing skin-lightening effects.

Just weeks before *Pinky* was released, Walter White wrote an article for *Look* magazine in which he seemed to locate the utopic future of race relations in a chemical (monobenzyl ether of hydroquinone) that would change the colour of skin. ‘It could’, he wrote, ‘conquer the color line.’⁶⁶ The two photographs above were used to illustrate White’s article, to show the hoped-for effects of using the miracle chemical. Of course, this is the same photograph, which has been overexposed in the change from black to white. Photography, in this instance, is using a chemical process to change skin colour from black to white.⁶⁷ Elia Kazan uses similar techniques in *Pinky*, but rather than overexposing the film, he makes use of “natural” light and shadow. He also has a

⁶⁶ Walter White, ‘Has Science Conquered the Color Line?’, *Look*, 30 August 1949, 94. *Look* had a circulation of almost three million in 1948 and was seen as a rival to *Time* magazine.

⁶⁷ Or more accurately, the representation of a skin colour, the process of which is complicated further by the initial negative, inverted print being processed into a positive image.

repeated motif of the white figure of Pinky, heightened by her white nurse's uniform, being swallowed up by blackness. This shot is used when Miss Em dies, making Pinky her heir.

What is counter-intuitive about these effects is that we see Pinky stepping out of the shadows into the light. When she is in the shadows her colour is less defined and we might be unsure about saying that she appears to be white. When she turns into the light – as it becomes obvious that her skin colour would lead us to view her as white – Pinky is usually accepting her black identity. In a repeated scene (see example below), she steps out of the shadow of her fiancé to embrace her heritage.



Figure 23: Pinky steps out of the shadow.

The opposite effect is used immediately following the death of Miss Em. We have seen her with Miss Em in her bedroom as the matriarch dies. The camera then withdraws for a long shot in which we see only Pinky's white uniform, which fades into the black screen. Somewhat counter-intuitively, as she becomes the heir of the fiercely white Miss Em, she loses her whiteness and becomes engulfed by blackness. This is also an echo of the view which Pinky would have had as a child, looking up at the "big house", only able to see a white figure, and knowing that she represented something from which Pinky was barred. One of the strictest rules of her childhood was that she must not enter the grounds of Miss Em.



Figure 24: Pinky fades to black.

The final shots of the film combine these two effects, serving to emphasise the ambivalent and multifaceted interpretations allowed by the strange effects of the film. As she steps out of the shadow which is cast by the signpost marking Miss Em's clinic, her face becomes ever whiter as she embraces her blackness. At this point her face is bathed in a heavenly light before once again disappearing into blackness. The black screen is held for an unusually extended 55 frames, eventually giving way to a symbolically loaded 'The End'. There are five other scenes in the film which are marked by a long fade to black, two relating to the death of Miss Em, while the other three register departures from her fiancé which cast doubt on the future of the relationship.

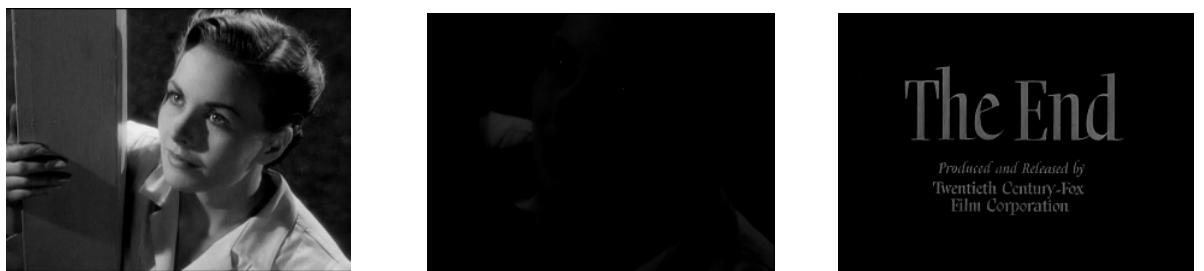


Figure 25: Final frames of *Pinky* (1949).

Throughout World War II, many of the army orientation films ended with the shot of a bell ringing to symbolise liberty. *Pinky* ends in the same way, but with the heroine in this enigmatic pose shown above. The ending is read by many commentators as a sacrificial offering, with the black female condemned to a life of servitude. The sociologist and historian Cindy Patton writes: ‘Pinky can be a (Black) person, but only if she accepts that the “meaning of [her] life” must be the sacrifice of her “happiness,” doubly figured as life as white and life with a sexuality.’⁶⁸ This thesis argues that the film can be read in a much more positive way. Zanuck himself saw the ending as celebratory, because ‘Pinky chooses to be a Negro. It is her choice and it is made voluntarily, and in doing so I think she rises in the estimation of the audience.’⁶⁹ By deciding against a marriage to a man who lacked courage and who was desperate to remove the name of Pinky Johnson from history, women in the audience may have found more to celebrate than to regret. Ironically enough, black women may have found more to applaud than the white women who were the target audience. The ending is as much a fulfilment as it is a sacrifice. After experiencing whiteness for herself, Pinky may have reached the same conclusion as James Baldwin: ‘As long as you think you're white, there's no hope for you.’⁷⁰ As the physical embodiment of miscegenation, Pinky is, to some extent, the stereotypical “tragic mulatto”, although that term is never mentioned in the film. But in her rejection of a fixed identity, she is seen to triumph over white male authority: in the shape of her fiancé who would lead her to reject her name, and in the shape of the patriarchal structure of the town – police, court, medicine – who sought to deny her heritage.

⁶⁸ Cindy Patton, *Cinematic Identity: Anatomy of a Problem Film*, Theory out of Bounds, v. 29 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 101.

⁶⁹ Quoted in George Frederick Custen, *Twentieth Century's Fox: Darryl F. Zanuck and the Culture of Hollywood* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 301. Admittedly, with characteristic melodramatic flair, he does precede this with a demand that ‘You cannot in the last reel give Joan of Arc novocaine to ease the pain. She has to burn at the stake.’ Custen, 301. Original quote from Zanuck letter to Charles Einfeld, 10 February 1949, Doheny Library, University of Southern California.

⁷⁰ ‘James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket – The Film – Education, Discussion Topics’, accessed 24 June 2017, <http://jamesbaldwinproject.org/AboutJBTTopics.html>. Baldwin elaborates this by saying that to think of oneself as white entails thinking of others as black. Such a binary opposition is what creates the hopelessness. Another possible reading is to think that whiteness itself is such an impossible ideal, that to believe it might apply to yourself creates an unreasonable ambition.

At the same time, she remains constrained by these structures, which are shaped by the same visual regime we saw at work in the case of Homer Plessey. In order for Pinky to take on the role, she has accepted she must place herself in a visual framework that allows her to be recognised as black. The clinic and nursery school she runs is for black children, with black staff and Aunt Dicey doing the laundry.



Figure 26: Pinky places herself where her race can be recognised.

The ending contains another of the reversals which run throughout the film. Pinky grew up being locked out of the grounds of Miss Em's big house, as were all of the other black children in the neighbourhood. The film ends with scores of black children playing in the same garden. But this time, as is the case for Pinky, they are fenced in rather than locked out. By choosing the clinic, Pinky has made herself invisible to the town's whites but if they should see her, they will be able to correctly place her. Appropriately contextualised, and thus racially categorised, she can be taken in and captured by white eyes in a way that upholds their visual regime. By showing this conclusion, is the film complicit in endorsing segregation? Insofar as it features happy staff, children, and a successful institution, it could be attacked as such. But this would be to reflect only on the surface of the film. Approaching film as the polymorphously perverse medium it has been shown to be, we might consider instead how various viewers could have identified with this film. For an hour or two in the darkened theatre, white heterosexual men, for example, might have seen the world through the eyes of a black woman. At the same time, and represented in the same body, they might have

gazed with desire at Jeanne Crain. And while the narrative entailed Pinky changing 180 degrees from black to white according to where she was placed, the viewer saw the same figure, speaking the same way, at all times staying true to herself. Thus, seeing the same figure on the same screen and identifying with her plight, the viewer might register their own previous misrecognitions.

Pinky is reconfigured as black on three occasions in the film, and on each occasion is immediately a threat to the white character: first as capable of violence, second as a harlot, and finally as a thief. The journalist and sociologist Gary Younge has recently shared similar experiences, being branded as an illegal immigrant, a thief, a vagrant, a criminal, and a delivery man, each identity a function of representing a black body in a particular context: always a stereotype or archetype rather than an individual. As Younge says, 'One of the ways that racism operates is through a consistent process of misidentification.' Black persons, he says are always interchangeable: 'As minorities we are hypervisible; as individual human beings we are relatively invisible.'⁷¹

This thesis has shown how this interplay of hypervisibility and invisibility of the black body has been a central feature of American twentieth-century history. It has enabled and legitimised segregation, lynching, institutional discrimination, sterilisation, incarceration and countless everyday micro-aggressions. From its emergence in the late 1890s, cinema has been complicit in buttressing the racism that allowed these practices by privileging whiteness and denigrating and casting out blackness. During and after World War II, the movie industry gestured towards addressing and correcting this skewed vision. But this way of seeing had become so locked-in and normalised that it was too much for a handful of films to undo the work of the thousands of productions that preceded them. I will conclude by drawing together some of the themes that have held together the various chapters and what we can learn from them today.

⁷¹ Gary Younge, 'I Was Recently Mistaken for David Lammy, Which Makes a Change from Steve McQueen', accessed 7 February 2020, <https://inews.co.uk/opinion/gary-younge-mistaken-for-david-lammy-steve-mcqueen-1381951>.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Our constant control is the American white man. We require no other control.
*Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey*¹

In July 1950, UNESCO² issued a ‘Statement on Race’ in which it was stressed that ‘for all practical social purposes “race” is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth’.³ Within two months of this statement, the word *brain-washing* had been introduced into the American lexicon. The ‘Statement on Race’ is important because it has come to represent the official ‘retreat of scientific racism’.⁴ It was also often referred to as the “Ashley Montagu Statement” indicating the pivotal influence of the naturalised American anthropologist Ashley Montagu, who had studied at Columbia University in the 1930s, and in 1942 wrote *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*.⁵ Moreover, as diplomatic historian Anthony Q. Hazard notes: ‘As the nation-state that rose to unmatched political and economic power immediately following World War II, the United States commanded a huge role in the formation of the United Nations, UNESCO, and the articulation of anti-racism in the postwar period.’⁶ Hazard goes on to detail the peculiar relationship that America had with UNESCO. On the one hand the organisation’s Assistant Secretary, William Benton described it as a ‘new instrument of United States foreign policy.’⁷ On the other hand, many commentators within America railed against the global ambitions of the organisation, with a particular focus on the damage it was alleged to be doing to the concept of American values being taught in schools. In March 1947, the *Chicago Tribune* suggested that ‘the real purpose

¹ Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey, *The Mark of Oppression: A Psychological Study of the American Negro* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1951), 11.

² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

³ UNESCO, *The Race Question* (Paris: Unesco, 1950).

⁴ Anthony Q. Hazard, *Postwar Anti-Racism : The United States, UNESCO, and ‘Race’, 1945-1968* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

⁵ Ashley Montagu, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1997). Such work made Montagu the target for anti-communists and he would eventually be dismissed from his academic position at Rutgers University.

⁶ Hazard, *Postwar Anti-Racism : The United States, UNESCO, and ‘Race’, 1945-1968*, 2.

⁷ Hazard, 13.

of these shenanigans is to undermine the confidence of the young people of this country in their own nation, its form of government, its free institutions, and its record.”⁸

Throughout, this thesis has sought to differentiate an argument about historical legacies, widely shared cultural assumptions or film-industry practices, from possible claims about intentional goals, let alone plots or conspiracies. That is to say, I have been careful to not claim any kind of conscious, manipulated strategy to replace one form of discourse born out of a racist worldview for another invested in the new concept of brainwashing. But what I have shown is how attempts such as the ‘Statement on Race’ to challenge and mute racialised discourse might have helped the newly emerging and often nebulous concept of brainwashing to acquire some of its resonance. The argument, here, to reiterate, is that white Americans were able to grasp the contours of the new concept because it had a similar shape to the racist mapping which had been used to navigate the hierarchies of society before the war. Black Americans, as we saw through the comments of James Baldwin and leaders of the Black Panthers, were able to recognise racism as a set of techniques which had been used to subjugate them, most importantly by fixing an image of subhumanity in the minds of their white oppressors.

The notion of white supremacy was uncontroversial for many people until well into the 1930s, and many white Americans were implacably opposed to race-mixing of any form that might lead to mixed-race children. It is not essential that there was a vocal argument here on the need for white supremacy. The prioritisation of white interests, and the centrality of their rights and norms had been baked into the nation’s institutions. This meant that a white person could take full advantage of their whiteness without ever making a statement extolling white supremacy; indeed, they could do so while professing to be anti-racist.⁹ One of the features of American racism this thesis has revealed, has been its normalisation through the mechanics of social structures, and the images and narratives contained in its dominant culture. This means that white people can view their world through a racist lens without being aware that they are

⁸ ‘Propaganda in Schools’, *Chicago Tribune*, 29 March 1947, 10.

⁹ For a recent influential, and controversial, account of “white fragility” which is connected to the maintenance of white privilege see Robin J. DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018). For a set of practical ideas on what it really means to be an anti-racist see Ibram X. Kendi, ‘How to Be an Antiracist’, 2019, <https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=DD0231D6-3121-40AA-917B-D89086B52C6A>.

doing so, and even when making inadequate or misguided attempts to not view the world in such a way.

The generally positive reaction of white viewers to *The Negro Soldier* – the film which formed the basis of Chapter 5 - was a sign that changes in the attitudes of whites were perhaps afoot. White soldiers were overwhelmingly positive about the film and almost eighty percent of them said they thought it should be shown to white civilians.¹⁰ Nevertheless, for a vocal and politically significant group, the prohibition of miscegenation was the defining principle of their political outlook. Gallup opinion polls taken during the 1950s showed over ninety percent opposition to interracial marriage.¹¹ Alongside the UNESCO statement, the US government and its agencies stepped back from support for white supremacist views and made pronouncements extolling America as a place of freedom and opportunity for all.

I have claimed that the discourses around brainwashing in the early part of the 1950s are politically pertinent, because they offer another potential outlet for the views implicated in racist dialogue. Specifically, the communist was seen as an existential threat to the future of “Americanism”, just as miscegenation was described as a threat to whiteness. The biggest danger to the purity of whiteness – as we saw vividly illustrated in Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* – was the mulatto. This was because it could be difficult to immediately recognise them as black. In order to avoid being seduced and taken over by the mulattoes it was thus perceived to be necessary to first segregate them as much as possible, and then to be alert to signs and gestures that revealed their true nature. And so with the communist. Everything should be done to keep the communist from infiltrating American society and structures; and on an individual level, everyone should look out for the signs of a communist. The places that they would seek to infiltrate would be the same places that so much work had been done to keep black Americans from infiltrating: federal and state government, the schools, the trades unions, and the media. A glaring red light in this assessment of communist danger would be support for civil rights. The ambitions of the communist could be dressed up in a variety of ways but the ultimate goal was to wipe out America and replace it with a state that turned its citizens into slaves. This was a point made

¹⁰ Cripps and Culbert, ‘The Negro Soldier (1944): Film Propaganda in Black and White’, 630.

¹¹ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 206.

repeatedly by Edward Hunter, who shifted from making accusations of slave labour under communist regimes to a form of psychic slavery which constituted their most immediate and chilling threat to Americans. He even referred to 'scientific laboratories' staffed by 'slave professors.'¹² The double sense here of the professor turned into a slave and of being an expert in slavery is interesting: expansive knowledge channelled into mechanical outcomes. The bedrock of this outlook, as this thesis has stressed, was the bifurcation of the world into free persons and slaves: the very binary construction that the 'Statement on Race' was keen to dismantle.

The 'Statement on Race' actually followed several landmark interventions in America which signalled that it was ready to begin overturning the racist structures that were undermining its claims to represent the acme of democracy. Chief among these interventions were the establishment of the President's Committee on Civil Rights in December 1946, President Truman delivering a speech at the annual conference of the NAACP in June 1947, and the desegregation of the armed services in July 1948. Such developments encouraged a group of filmmakers to make movies which addressed American racism. The four or five films that are associated with this cycle of films were the starting point – and endpoint – for this study. Two of the films (*Home of the Brave* and *Pinky*) were of particular interest in themselves but it was the collective release, and associated promotion and publicity, that was of greater significance for the thesis.

My aim in examining this group of largely forgotten films, and the history and context out of which they were formed, was to throw light on a number of issues. As mentioned, there are interesting parallels to be drawn between discourses about miscegenation and brainwashing. As I have shown, further significant questions arise, in light of those connections – questions I have taken up in this study: what was the significance of captivity and segregation – and associated threats of infiltration and contamination – for the concept of brainwashing? As a vitally important medium of cultural transmission in twentieth-century America, what did cinema contribute towards fears of miscegenation, and what did this group of films have to say about it? Had racism been generally challenged or underwritten by filmmakers and their supporting institutions? And, what role was played by the psychoanalytic profession,

¹² Hunter, *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied It*, 8.

and can psychoanalysis help us to understand these parallels? Did the cycle of race films made in 1949 help bring about a change in racial attitudes? I will summarise the approach of the thesis to these questions in turn.

Miscegenation

Part One of this dissertation stressed just how deeply ingrained racism has been in American history, and how it has permeated its institutions and social structures. The thesis drew on the work of Eric Foner, Gary Gerstle and Ibram X. Kendi, which has well established this basic premise. The postwar period saw the first serious and sustained attempts by influential policy makers and political actors to dismantle some of these constructions. In 1954, to take a notable example, the Supreme Court found the racial segregation of children in public schools unconstitutional. This ruling, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* amounted to an overthrow of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling of 1896. But as Part One also showed, the white treatment of black people as less than human had been deeply ingrained in the lived experience, schooling and cultural attitudes of many white Americans; despite these legislative changes, the mistreatment of black people and the belief in white supremacy were still prevalent in much of the country.

As is well known, attempts to enforce the desegregation of schools led to heated and often violent protests on the part of some white students and their parents. This is well documented in Kathryn Sophia Belle's (the founding director of the Collegium of Black Women Philosophers and formerly known as Kathryn T. Gines) *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question* (2014).¹³ The events and discussions Belle compiles offer particularly rich material for future research as they comprise of discussions and disagreements between Arendt and Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin on the priority that civil rights activists should give to attacking anti-miscegenation. Many of the white protestors were open about the fact that it was the potential of social mixing leading to miscegenation that was at the root of their objections.¹⁴ I have stressed throughout this study the degree to which pervasive fears of miscegenation fuelled the irrational and illogical ways in which black people were seen by many white Americans. And

¹³ Kathryn T. Gines, *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Godfrey, 'Bayonets, Brainwashing, and Bathrooms: The Discourse of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Desegregation of Little Rock's Central High', 52.

moreover, how such fear shaped the manner in which white Americans interacted with them. Chapter 2 introduced Robert Jay Lifton's formulation of eight features of totalistic environments. At least four of these – the demand for purity, sacred science, doctrine over person, and the dispensing of existence – were claimed to be at the heart of anti-miscegenation doctrine. The most important feature, milieu control, was also considered as a practical management of the doctrine. The control exercised through the racist systems and structures is premised on being unable to frame the world in a meaningful way outside of its configuration: a configuration that was ultimately driven by the prohibition of miscegenation.

James Baldwin has been a frequent interlocutor during this study and he also drew attention to the white American fear of race-mixing. He pointed to the guilt which was bound up with this fear: the inability of most white Americans to accept that Baldwin's ancestry was a part of the nation's soil no less than any white person's was. In fact, Baldwin pointed out in 1966 that while he could be relatively certain that he was 'flesh of their flesh', most white Americans could not be certain that they were white. Such uncertainty, with so much at stake over the answer, contributed to the demand for segregation. By identifying and living as white, and by recognising and ostracising those who are deemed or declared not to be white, allowed for literal borders and lines to be drawn. It mattered not that there was an element of performance in all this. Indeed, it is one of the claims of this thesis that the growing awareness of role-playing in acquiring or cementing an identity was one of the defining features of this period. Erving Goffman pulled together these ideas on performance and the artifice of social interactions in his influential *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956).¹⁵ Awareness of such artifice was one of the reasons there was anxiety attached to self-identity as well as the true identity of others. And the possession of whiteness was a key element of this. As Daniel Bernardi was quoted at the very outset of the study: 'there are no white people per se, only those who pass as white.' Whiteness was not something guaranteed by birth, but something that needed to be performed.

In Chapter 4 I showed how the prohibition of miscegenation was a pivotal concern of D.W Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*. Griffith's film posits that the real birth of America as a modern nation was marked when the Ku Klux Klan led the white

¹⁵ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1990).

rejection of black enfranchisement, but even more so by its violent reaction to the spectre of miscegenation. This illustrates that for Griffith, in ways that seemed to resonate with enthusiastic audiences, to claim to belong to America resided in the possession of whiteness, and the nation's future demanded the protection of white women from black men. In the final chapter of this part, I examined a very different film *Pinky*, produced by Darryl Zanuck. This was made, at least in part, as an attempt to break the general silence on race that had been one consequence of *The Birth of a Nation*. But again, at its centre, I argue, was the issue of miscegenation: this time, in a quite literal sense, in the miscegenous body of Pinky herself. Whereas in Griffith's earlier film, the mulatto figures are presented as irredeemably lascivious and hungry for power, here Pinky is ordinary, even bland. But her identity (within certain constraints) is something that she will decide: she can choose to be black or white, even if the latter comes at the cost of moving to Denver. The looseness and fluidity of Pinky's identity is only stretched and complicated by the fact that she is being played by a clearly white actress who ultimately decides to be black. *Pinky* offered its audience the message that they were not bound to the roles that had been set out for them, even if *Pinky* does choose in the end to be a "good Negro". But as I argue throughout the thesis, when we recognise that we *can* act in various ways, and take on different roles, we might wonder if we can also be *made* to act in particular ways, and forced to take on certain roles. Moreover, we might not even be aware that we are being manipulated. Such fears were part of the breeding ground for the scares that would develop around brainwashing. In the second part of the thesis I described how, if film had never been accused of brainwashing, it had often been accused of moulding or manipulating the minds of its audiences.

Captivity and Segregation

I have claimed that the idea of captivity is central to brainwashing in several ways and have stressed its significance in the title of the thesis. In Chapter 2, I considered how the enslavement of Africans in America could be viewed as a template for the more extreme, fantasised accounts of brainwashing. This was so because the conditioning used to turn people into slaves involved, ideally, an obliteration of their previous identity and the reduction of the body to a robotic reaction to commands and utter dependence on the master. It was no coincidence that totalitarian regimes were accused of using brainwashing techniques to reduce their citizens to slaves. And if not slaves,

the comparison to zombies or automatons works from a similar template. Indeed, a cinema history of such representations – beginning with *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920) and Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932), George Romero's "Living Dead" films and culminating in the recent work of Jordan Peele – and their concatenation of race, thought control, and modernity, although beyond the scope of this present study, offers fruitful future research. Peele's surprise 2017 hit *Get Out* offers notably rich material with its themes of slavery, miscegenation, and psychiatric thought control.

The end of slavery ostensibly meant that former slaves were free to go where they wished to. I noted the work of Lisa Guenther and Sharon Shalev in highlighting how the prison system became the heir to slavery. The recent documentary by Ava DuVernay *13th* (2016) makes a similar powerful point about the actual scope of the Thirteenth Amendment. One of the problems freedom of movement created for the defeated but still dominant white Southerners was that the result of their prolific sexual abuse could not be hidden and contained. Sons and daughters whose skin reflected their true parentage, no longer confined to the plantation, presented a threat to visual stability. The American Culture scholar Jolie A. Sheffer documents extensive evidence of this in her *The Romance of Race* (2013). Indeed she shows that in some families the prevalence of interracial sex was so marked that the lines between miscegenation and incest became quite blurred.¹⁶ The denial and disavowal of such family histories was, I contend, apparent in, or arguably even part of the reason for, the often obsessive outlawing of miscegenation, and contributed significantly to the extension and enforcement of segregationist practices and legislation. I stressed that this was part of a process of, as much as possible, removing the black body from the white field of view. When black people were seen, they would generally be in places that would make them immediately recognisable as black, even when that was not "written on the skin". Moreover, they would be seen in ways that fed off myths and stereotypes, making the actual person, in Ellison's sense, invisible. In performing this misrecognition, the white looker becomes the "captured mind" of the title: someone who has become so captivated by the narratives, images, and the supposed historicity of white supremacy, that they have lost the ability to see correctly.

¹⁶ Jolie A. Sheffer, *The Romance of Race: Incest, Miscegenation, and Multiculturalism in the United States, 1880-1930*, American Literatures Initiative (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 13.

In the next chapter I explored the significance of the first brainwashing scare of the early 1950s, emerging in the context of American prisoners being held captive by a racialised Other, in this case during the Korean War. I showed how the characterisation of brainwashing changed between 1950 and 1953. Initially, politically recalcitrant Chinese people were said to have been forcefully re-educated into accepting communist doctrine. But after captured US airmen provided confessions of germ warfare, the American government and media generated fears of brainwashing that had more in common with emerging science fiction narratives. Now, the (largely unfounded) stories were of hypnosis, truth serums, bright lights, all administered by the Oriental who had an uncanny ability of mental seduction. I showed later, in Chapter 7, how American psychiatrists during World War II had already experimented with all of the allegedly new communist techniques.

Film and Propaganda

Throughout this thesis I have endeavoured to distance my argument from claims which have been made about the powers of cinema to control the individual mind or govern our collective thoughts. And of course there are many kinds of cinema thus making it absurdly reductive to generalise about some singular effect, purpose or outcome of 'cinema'. I have suggested no more than that film should be seen as a potential tool for propaganda purposes and that where there is evidence of this, we may learn much from the techniques employed and the thinking that went into the uses. I concluded Part One with a study of Samuel Fuller's *The Steel Helmet*, which was notable for the speed of its response to the outbreak of the Korean War, its focus on the attempts to turn a black American and a Japanese American against their country on the grounds of their racial treatment, and the accusations of a prominent journalist that the film was left-wing propaganda. The potential for film to be used as propaganda was now fully accepted, not least because its producers had loudly proclaimed its capacity to do so at the outbreak of World War II.

Part Two began with an overview of the history of the first fifty years of cinema, with a focus on its representation of race and its capacity for manipulation. It showed that the key film dealing with race in this period was *The Birth of a Nation*. It was also a film that had been accused by some its detractors of steering the minds of young viewers towards an acceptance of damaging racist beliefs. And indeed, we did see that

there was some evidence of the film encouraging youngsters to take up extreme racist positions as a direct result of viewing the film. The Crystal Lake test of attitudes before and after a viewing of the film revealed that some individuals after seeing the movie became more likely to call for the extermination of Negroes if the ascendancy of the white race was at all threatened by them. The general impact of *The Birth of a Nation* was to relegate black Americans to the periphery of the screen and its action, with roles serving or entertaining the white stars. As often as not though, black Americans were absent.

There were always voices demanding better cinematic representation of black people but it was not until the outbreak of war that they were really listened to and, to some degree, responded to by filmmakers. In each of the chapters of Part Two, I showed how a range of films addressed the issue of race in America. Some, such as *The Negro Soldier* approached the subject directly and were a small part of changing attitudes; others, such as *Behind the Rising Sun*, were themselves symptomatic of racial prejudices and only served to entrench them. The reason that films such as *The Negro Soldier* were only partly, if at all, successful, was that they were limited in number, were still imbued with the same stereotypes and archetypes they were meant to be shattering, and were not followed up with concrete measures to address the institutional racism of the industry itself. I have stressed throughout this study that the most damaging stereotype is usually the invisible and unheard “absent presence” of the black American in cinema. James Snead’s warnings about the dangers of a repeated absence becoming a reality rightly position the few flashes of blackness within an overwhelmingly white canvas.¹⁷

Psychoanalysis and Race

Part One ended with the image of Frantz Fanon in a cinema waiting with anticipation and apprehension for the movie to begin. He describes the tension he feels at what might be on screen as his heart making his head swim. The film Fanon is waiting to watch is *Home of the Brave* which I discussed at length in Chapter 7. The figure of authority in this film, and the one who allows the mentally scarred black soldier to

¹⁷ Recent television series *Mad Men* and *Mrs. America* more knowingly note precisely this marginalization or eradication of the black figure by sometimes foregrounding the visibility of the black domestic servant.

recover, is a psychoanalyst. At various points in the study, I have called on psychoanalysis as a means of addressing racism, specifically through the writings of Freud, Klein and Fanon.¹⁸

I referenced Freud for his thoughts on the dangers of the crowd, which he saw as thriving on spontaneous energy in ways similar to the individual id. He also claimed that groups are apt to prefer the unreal over what is real, and thus have a craving for illusions. Given that film is a medium that is, in essence, an illusion of reality, and that the effect of watching as an audience has been privileged as a particular danger, it is not surprising that its detractors have corralled such concerns in their attacks upon it. But throughout this study we have seen that audiences are far from being the passive recipients of carefully crafted messages that they can sometimes be painted as. If we return to Fanon in the cinema, he waits with trepidation because he is aware of what the images might be. I suggested in Chapter 2 that Fanon might well be calling to mind Gus, from *The Birth of a Nation*, the renegade slave who pursues a white woman and is killed as a result. When he watches *Home of the Brave*, Fanon resists what he thinks is the intended message of the film to ‘adopt the humility of the cripple’. Indeed in his determination to resist it, he feels empowered.

What Fanon also recognises is that it is the general white audience that is at most risk of falling under a cinematic spell. It is this knowledge which makes him so fearful of what he is about to see. He knows that they are likely to (knowingly) mistake what they see on the screen as a realistic representation of a black person. To understand how this ‘knowing mistake’ can take place I found it helpful to call on some of the work of Klein, particularly her idea that in order to structure the world in a bifurcated way, the infant projects unwanted parts of the self onto an external object. The primitive, fantastical ways that black people have been characterised by whites typifies this

¹⁸ Psychoanalysts themselves – in an instance of not taking their lead from Freud’s expressed distaste for the medium – have taken a great interest in cinema as a condensation of psychoanalytic ideas. Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites offered a psychoanalytic interpretation of *No Way Out* in 1950 which stressed the projection of unwanted attributes of the white viewer into the black body. See Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, ‘Two Social Scientists View “No Way Out”’, *Commentary* 10 (1 January 1950): 388–391. Glen O. Gabbard and his brother Krin Gabbard have analysed the cross-currents between psychiatry and film in Krin Gabbard and Glen O. Gabbard, *Psychiatry and the Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). And the philosopher Slavoj Žižek has drawn on the work of Jacques Lacan in numerous books as an approach to various films and television series.

process and cinema can be seen as drawing from and feeding into it. Moreover, the use of blackface in early cinema can be read as a way of denying guilt while at the same time vicariously partaking in behaviour meant to be anathema to the white person.

Psychoanalysis then, does provide some useful theoretical ways of approaching racism and the implication of cinema in its reach and reverberation. But it would be fair to say that as an American – and Western - practice it has fallen short of speaking for, to, and with black people, as well as other ethnic minorities. Even when psychoanalysis has focused on the black American, the white male has been cast as the stabilising centre of the project. The psychoanalysts Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey set out in their 1951 study *The Mark of Oppression* that 'Our constant control is the American white man. We require no other control.'¹⁹ This could have been the mantra of Hollywood too, with the American white man as the embodiment of the gaze of the viewer, the eyes through which the white woman fulfils her connotation of *to-be-looked-at-ness*, in Laura Mulvey's famous phrase.²⁰ And meanwhile, the black absence or marginalisation satisfies what we might call a *not-to-be-seen-ness*.

James Baldwin was dismissive of any benefits that might be gained from psychoanalysis. When asked if he had ever considered it for himself he quipped "God no, never got 'adjusted.'"²¹ Nevertheless, we saw in some of Baldwin's characterisations of the racism of American whites, that the language of psychoanalysis, in terms of guilt, projection, trauma, and repression, was very much to the fore. We also saw this in the case of Ralph Ellison. Ellison saw the potential benefits of psychoanalysis but rejected the capacity of standard white practices to deliver it to black patients. To this end he was instrumental, along with Richard Wright and the psychoanalyst Fredric Wertham, in establishing the Lafargue Mental Health Clinic in Harlem in 1946.²² Ellison, more so even than Baldwin, captured both in his novel and his essays, something of the

¹⁹ Kardiner and Ovesey, *The Mark of Oppression*, 11.

²⁰ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1 October 1975): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6>.

²¹ Quoted in McIvor, 'The Struggle of Integration', 77.

²² The collaboration of these three men offers rich potential for future research in this field. For good accounts see Gabriel N. Mendes, *Under the Strain of Color: Harlem's Lafargue Clinic and the Promise of an Antiracist Psychiatry*, Cornell Studies in the History of Psychiatry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015). Jay Garcia, *Psychology Comes to Harlem: Rethinking the Race Question in Twentieth-Century America*, New Studies in American Intellectual and Cultural History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

irrational, unconscious forces which propelled white Americans toward lives structured around the avoidance of blacks. He wrote of how they 'force the Negro down into the inner world, where reason and madness mingle with hope and memory and endlessly give birth to nightmare and to dream; down into the province of the psychiatrist and the artist, from whence spring the lunatic's fancy and the work of art.'²³ Moreover, such is the toxicity of the image of the black man, it prevents white people from properly seeing many of the defining aspects of life. Ellison wrote: 'it is practically impossible for the white American to think of sex, of economics, his children or womenfolk, or of sweeping socio-political changes, without summoning into consciousness fear-flecked images of black men.'²⁴ Ellison was speaking specifically of the problems encountered by the white artist in attempting to convey the contents of their inner world. The failure he speaks of is the same shortfall of imagination with which I charged Griffith in Chapter 4's review of *The Birth of a Nation*.

The Impact of the Race Cycle of Films

William Couch, director of the University of Chicago Press in the 1940s, wrote for the journal *Phylon* in 1950 on the raft of new plays and films speaking about race. He professed gratitude for the fact that the films had been made, but declined to praise them as fulfilling the good intentions which may have inspired them. He bemoaned the failure to develop realistic characters. 'Instead', he wrote, 'there has been a mere upgrading or substitution of stereotypes.'²⁵ The basic premise of the article is that 'a dramatic situation, capable of producing a powerful effect, will usually suffer a distortion of that effect when the agent of action is a Negro character.'²⁶ A consistent thread which runs through these films is that the black character ultimately depends for salvation on the 'slow awakening of white conscience.'²⁷ In *Home of the Brave*, we see a physically powerful, intelligent and successful character, Moss, reduced to someone who depends on his white colleagues to defend him from attacks, and eventually to rescue him from the island and transport him back to America. The character is almost

²³ Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 100.

²⁴ Ellison, 100.

²⁵ William Couch, 'The Problem of Negro Character and Dramatic Incident', *Phylon* (1940–1956) 11, no. 2 (1950): 127, <https://doi.org/10.2307/271142>.

²⁶ Couch, 128.

²⁷ Couch, 129.

literally “the white man’s burden”. As Couch puts it, ‘We know *about* him, but the main action of the drama turns on his mute suffering, which gradually increases to hysteria.’²⁸ These films were an advance from the lazy and insulting stereotypes which had blighted Hollywood’s output before the war. But, argued Couch, instead cinemagoers were shown the apparent inevitability of black ‘submissive suffering’. The suffering is an expiation of the sin of being black and therefore unclean. It is a suffering which means that ‘he shall be washed white as snow.’²⁹ And although most of the productions do contain a strong speech which is aimed at discrediting racism, these usually come towards the end of the film and are invariably mouthed by a white spokesman.

The visibility of black Americans on the nation’s cinema screens did increase in 1949 with the release of the race cycle, but only in a circumscribed way: a newly varnished stereotype of worthy public servants who would be valuable citizens if good liberal white folk spoke up in their defence. The second part of this thesis demonstrated that there was an organised effort – formal and informal – to improve the image of America from that of the racist, segregated society it was perceived as by much of the world. It also showed that the discrete, limited attempts to do this did little to tackle the underlying, often unconscious, structural racism that continued to impact films such as *Magic Town* and the majority of other films made in Hollywood during that period, as well as in the new televisual world. This would mean that significant numbers of white Americans would remain fixated by the stereotypical view of black people that film had helped to foster; seeing the world in an irrational way that made them still ‘the slightly mad victims of their own brainwashing.’³⁰

²⁸ Couch, 129.

²⁹ Couch, 130–31.

³⁰ James Baldwin, *The Fire next Time* (London: Penguin Books, 1964), 86.

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